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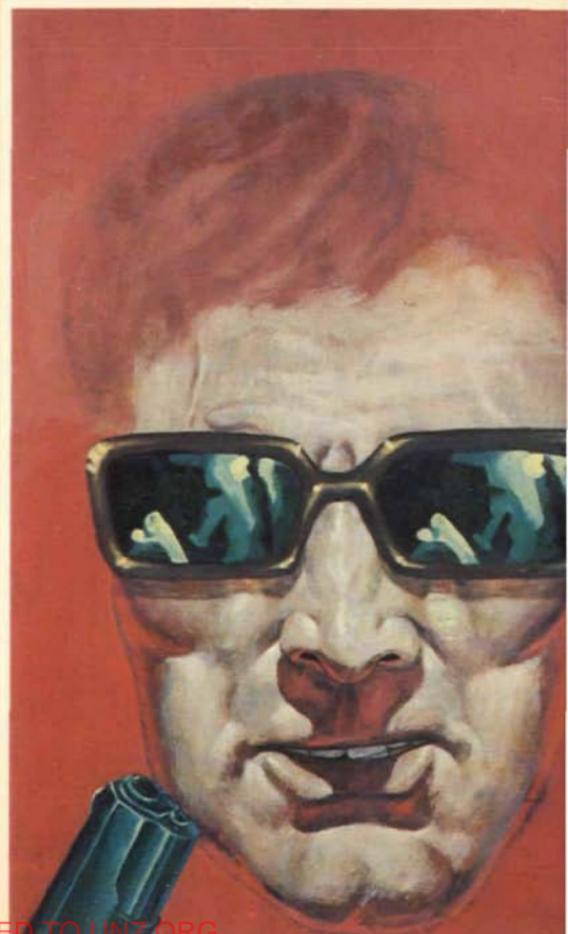
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JUNE 313

JUNE, 1976
VOL. 38, NO. 6

MIKE SHAYNE



MYSTERY MAGAZINE

NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL

MURDER AFTER MIDNIGHT

by BRETT HALLIDAY

When Emerald Queen Evelyn Ireland hires Shayne to find her missing son, the Miami redhead is not aware that the youth is Number One suspect in the murder of beautiful and bad Loretta Thomas. Called off the case by his client, ordered off by the Police, Shayne finds that he cannot get clear of what quickly develops into a double killing—and is finally forced to undergo ludicrous humiliation en route to exposing a deadly blackmail ring..... 2 to 49

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MIKE SHAYNE MYSTERY MAGAZINE, Vol. 38, No. 6, June, 1976. Published monthly by Renown Publications, Inc., 8230 Beverly Blvd., Los Angeles, Calif. 90048. Subscriptions, One Year (12 issues) \$9.00; Two Years (24 issues) \$18.00; single copies 75¢. Second-class postage paid at Los Angeles, Cal., and at additional mailing offices. Places and characters in this magazine are wholly fictitious. © 1976 by Renown Publications, Inc. All rights reserved. Protection secured under the International and Pan-American copyright conventions. Printed in the United States of America. Postmaster—return 3579 to 8230 Beverly Boulevard, Los Angeles, California 90048.

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MURDER AFTER MIDNIGHT

If young Richie Ireland didn't murder Loretta Thomas, then why was he on the lam? And if Richie didn't kill her, who did? When Richie's mother hired Shayne to find the boy a second victim was already as good as dead on arrival.



by Brett Halliday

THE INCREDIBLE lavender eyes narrowed and Evelyn Ireland said, "Mr. Shayne, I want you to find my son."

The hour was close upon one o'clock in the morning. He had been on the verge of turning in when the phone rang forty minutes earlier in his Second Avenue apartment across Biscayne Bay, following a quiet evening at one of their favorite

restaurants with his secretary and great and good friend Lucy Hamilton.

His first impulse had been not to answer the shrill summons—but the thought that it might be a call from Lucy with some forgotten message caused him reluctantly to pick up the instrument. Evelyn Ireland's husky contralto demand for his immediate presence in

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Complete in this issue

THE NEW MIKE SHAYNE SHORT NOVEL



her Beach Towers terrace apartment had been impossible to ignore.

It was the voice of an uncrowned empress whose every whim had for a lifetime been treated as law. Combined with the redhead's quite natural curiosity to see in the flesh the former so-called "Emerald Queen", unbowed veteran of four decades of spectacular living and scandal, and he had been drawn like the proverbial moth to the flame.

So here he was, face to face with her across an antique silver-legged glass-topped coffee table that must have cost what Shayne would have considered a very good year's income in pre-inflation days. Evelyn Ireland was ageless, expensive, unique—and she wanted him to find her son.

Shayne said, "How long has the boy been missing?"

She said, waving a green-tipped cigaret and, miraculously, not spilling the ash. "I have not seen Richard since Tuesday afternoon. The last I heard from him was when he called me late Wednesday evening"—pause to glance at an emerald-ringed platinum wristwatch—"at about this time."

"That's only forty-eight hours," said the detective. "Wouldn't it be wiser to—"

Another flick of the cigaret silenced him. The low and husky voice said, "Mr. Shayne, ever since he was first sent away to school, Richard has called me every single night he has not been with me. The only times he has missed, he was in a hospital or some other sort of trouble. I want you to make sure he's all right."

It was final, conclusive. She added, "I shall pay you double your usual fee and retainer. You can work out the details with Ramon. He's my business manager."

She nodded toward the dark haired, sleek looking character who had answered the redhead's ring of the doorbell, rose like an empress in shimmering green moiré and strode majestically from the room. He noted that, apart from the wristwatch and single emerald ring of at least a dozen karats, the so-called "Emerald Queen" wore no other jewelry. He had an idea Lucy might be interested as he made a mental note of the fact.

The dark haired man said, "I'm Ramon de Jonggh." He pronounced it "de Yong" and offered the detective a personal card from a gold-tipped red-morocco wallet which gave Shayne the spelling. Then he offered the redhead a drink from a green and silver cellaret

in a far corner equipped with elegant cut-glass decanters, poured him a Martell on the rocks and another for himself.

Shayne thought he looked fit, forty-ish and remarkably well poised, as well as beautifully tailored. Seated, they discussed the terms of his employment—a thousand dollar retainer, two hundred per day, plus expenses, terminable by either party on desire.

The detective said, "Any idea where I might look for the boy."

"He's not a boy," de Jonggh replied. "He's twenty-eight years old. If I knew where to look for him, I would not have advised Mrs. Ireland to hire you."

"Fair enough," said Shayne, "but you might tell me some of his hangouts around Miami. I might find a lead you overlooked—no offense intended."

"None taken." De Jonggh smiled and lifted his glass. Then, putting it down in its silver coaster, "Richard is, I suppose, what used to be called a playboy. At least, he tries. Being the son of Evelyn Ireland is not the easiest life for a young man."

"I'll buy that," the detective replied.

"The Swan Club, the Pentagon, the Golden Mule—you might try *them*. He has charge

accounts at all three, of course. And he spends time at de Frito's, the haberdasher, afternoons when he isn't at the track."

"Where does he live—here?" Shayne inquired.

"He has a small suite on the twelfth floor here at the Towers. If you'd care to look at it, I have a key."

A brief search of the young man's rooms revealed nothing to Shayne except that Richard Ireland had a lot more expensive clothes and personal gadgets than anyone he had ever known. After studying several photographs of Richie Ireland, they left. De Jonggh rode down to the lobby with him and wished him luck. Shayne had a feeling the man was sincere.

He said, turning back, "You said upstairs that the boy 'tries' to be a playboy. Doesn't he succeed?"

De Jonggh hesitated, permitted himself a faint smile. said, "Not really. It's not easy to explain. Richard does all the things the other young bloods do, but somehow he's not quite *with* it—if you know what I mean." A pause, then, "Perhaps he's too self-conscious to let it all hang out, if you'll pardon a phrase I detest."

"I pardon," said Shayne. "I'll be in touch tomorrow—I hope

with some news for your money."

"Not *my* money." De Jonggh drove the point hard. "Mrs. Ireland's."

As he went downstairs to the underground parking lot, the detective wondered if, were their roles reversed, de Jonggh would have hired a Mike Shayne to look for the boy. He wondered who and what de Jonggh was. He had seldom met a man so difficult to read beneath the cooperative facade.

He decided to try the Swan Club first, since it was the closest of the four resorts given him where young Ireland might possibly have left a trail. A middle-aged Irish manager, whose three-hundred-dollar suit did not go harmoniously with his burly bouncer's shoulders and bloated bloodshot face, replied to the detective's query with, "Jesus H. Christ! What is this—find-Richie-Ireland night? I had the police here asking the same dumb question. The answer is, I haven't seen Richie for at least three nights."

He sounded glad of the fact. In view of his attitude, the redhead asked no more questions but turned to the drink the manager ordered placed in front of him on the bar. He wanted to digest the news that the police were looking for his client's son, too. He wondered

why? Had somebody else put out a tracer on the young man and, if so, why? Or was Richie in some sort of real trouble? As he finished his cognac, he decided to call Will Gentry's office in the morning and see what he could pry out of them, Chief. Obviously, the police had a head start on him.

The Golden Mule was his next stop. Directly over the Causeway, in Miami proper, it was one of those unappetising small saloons in a frowsy district that, inexplicably, became the vogue for a time with the so-called beautiful people. It was definitely not golden in decor—mouse brown was closer to the reality—and if it did not sell white mule over its battered bar, it might as well have, to judge from the low-grade brandy Shayne was served.

But the bartender proved more willing to talk to the redhead than the Swan Club manager had been. He recognized the detective, greeted him by name, said he was glad to have him on the premises. That out of the way, Shayne asked him if he knew Richie Ireland.

"Richie?" The bartender, plump hearty and Italian, replied. "Sure I know him. He's in here almost every night." A pause, a frown, then. "But he hasn't been in for several

nights now. He isn't in any trouble, is he?"

"Not that I know of," said the detective. "His mother is worried about him. She hasn't heard from him lately."

"His mother . . ." Thoughtfully, the mixologist swabbed the scarred bartop with his towel. "If you ask me, his mother is what's wrong with the kid. Evelyn Ireland, the Emerald Queen—how can a boy grow up that *for* a mother? It's no wonder to me he drinks too much and has to go to a shrink to have his head examined."

Shayne filed this away for future reference, said, "Have the police been asking about him?"

The bartender cocked his head at Shayne, said, "It's funny you should ask that right now, Mr. Shayne."

"Funny?" said Mike. "Why?"

"Because a fuzzmobile has pulled up at the door." He nodded toward the entrance, said, "They're flashing their red light, too."

The detective thought, *What the hell!* and paid for his drink over the bartender's protests and went outside where the black-and-white car waited. A uniformed patrolman greeted him with. "Mr. Shayne? Captain wants to talk to you."

They let him drive his Buick downtown ahead of them. Captain Len Sturgis, Miami Chief



of Detectives, did not rise from behind his green metal desk to greet the redhead. He looked and acted as if he felt like a slept-in bed that hadn't been made for a week.

Before Shayne could say hello, he growled, "Mike, would you mind telling me why in hell *you're* looking for Richie Ireland?"

Shayne knew better than to put on the hulking Chief of Detectives in this mood. He said, "His mother hired me to find him—it seems he hasn't called in for a couple of days. I had no idea *you* wanted him?"

Sturgis stared at Shayne with bloodshot eyes as if trying to decide whether the redhead was serious or not. "So help me," Shayne told him, "that's all I know. Would you mind

telling me how I'm crowding you?"

"Did she give you any other joints he hangs out in?" the chief of Detectives asked. The redhead decided the police undoubtedly had the rest of his sparse information, so he did not hold out either the Pentagon or de Frito's. Sturgis growled. "That's all?"

"That's all," said Shayne. "Would you mind telling me what you want him for?"

"I would and I do—but since your news-buddy Rourke already has the story, there's not much point in refusing. This man you're looking for is the last known date Loretta Thomas had before she was murdered."

Shayne sat down. He had to. This was a true stunner. Roughly forty-eight hours earlier, at the behest of a number of persons who had been unable to reach Loretta Thomas in her expensive apartment for more than a day, the building manager had used his passkey and looked inside. He had found Loretta Thomas lying in a pool of her own blood on the bathroom floor with the back of her head blown off, apparently by a shotgun.

Condition of the body indicated that she had been dead at least twenty-four hours.

The murder was receiving

sensational play in the media for the simple reason that Loretta Thomas was a sensational young woman, one of those fascinating females who appears everywhere in the limelight but who remains a mystery. Despite dozens of rumors in the local gossip columns, no one had pinpointed her birthplace, her family background, where she came from or how she was supported.

Loretta Thomas was a woman of mystery, and when a woman of mystery is murdered, it sells papers and advertising time on the air. When she also happens to be reasonably young and unreasonably beautiful, the press and TV go all out.

As the redhead sat silent, Sturgis said, "Don't tell me you didn't know, Mike." And, when Shayne continued mute, the Chief of Detectives' eyebrows rose in his beefy face and he said, incredulous, "My God, you *didn't* know!"

Shayne could only shake his head in agreement. The fact or suspicion that Richie Ireland was involved in the murder, whether as perpetrator, witness or mere innocent bystander, had raised a whole hornet's nest of questions in his mind.

If Evelyn Ireland and Ramon de Jonggh had not had an inkling of the connection, why had they called him in? If they had

had an inkling, why hadn't they told him? Another question, possibly less important—who had let the police know that he was on the prowl for the young man? The Swan Club manager probably—but, if not, then who? Or had the police picked him up on their own.

Unlikely, he decided—not unless Evelyn or Ramon had tipped them. Had somebody else been on his tail unnoticed? Another good, if unanswerable, question.

He pulled himself back to the here and now, said, "So help me, Len, I had no idea. I'm being paid to find the kid, that's all—if I find him."

"Forget it," said Sturgis. "This killing could blow a hole in Miami. We can't have anyone on it we don't control. Pack it in, Mike—I mean it. In case you don't understand, I'm speaking for Chief Gentry, too."

Shayne spread his hands, said, "In that case, what the hell can I do—sue the department for fees and expenses I haven't earned?"

"You could try." Sturgis softened and gave what, on his face passed for a smile. "Honest, Mike, I hate to step on one of your fees. I feel like I'm robbing my own sainted mother's grave."

Shayne stood up, said, "If my mother hadn't brought me up to

be a gentleman at all times, I'd tell you and Will both to take a long flying leap for yourselves."

"Good night, Mike," said Sturgis as the redhead reached the door of his office, "It's always nice to have you drop in—like old times." Then, his voice hardening once more. "I'm not kidding, Mike. Pack it in on Richie Ireland."

II

SHAYNE FELT ultra-redheaded as he got the Buick going and out of the Headquarters parking lot. He could understand the official viewpoint, of course. But it didn't lessen his anger. Len Sturgis' high-handedness in ordering him off the case, plus his elephantine humor, rubbed him the wrong way. Ten times over, he told himself it was absurd to fight City Hall—without cooling off an iota.

To hell with them all! Shayne thought. He might as well stop in at the last of the three night spots Ramon de Jonggh had given him—the Pentagon. Not even the Police could forbid his having a nightcap in the club of his choice.

The Pentagon was a low-ceiled five-sided room featuring fluorescent shifting lights and heavily amplified Rock. It was moderately well populated with

the young and the would-be young of both sexes.

Shayne was about to scream at the bartender, asking if Richie Ireland had been there lately, when someone tapped his left shoulder. Turning, he found himself looking down at a stocky, slick-haired character wearing a broken nose and a lapel gardenia.

"Are you Michael Shayne?" His shout was barely audible above the surrounding uproar. And, when Shayne nodded, "I have a message for you. You're to call Ramon at this number."

He handed the redhead a slip of paper and led him through a swinging door to a corridor containing two phone booths, one of them occupied by a couple apparently more interested in making out than in making telephone calls. Mercifully, when the door swung shut, the noise was cut to a relative whisper.

Ignoring the lovers in the adjoining booth, Shayne dialed the number given him. After three rings, the voice of Ramon de Jonggh answered.

"Mr. Shayne?" He sounded relieved. "Since I couldn't reach you at home, I took a wild chance on the places whose names I gave you." A pause, then, "You haven't found Richie, have you?"

"Hardly—I've only begun to

look." The redhead wondered why the note of anxiety underlying de Jonggh's soft, controlled voice.

"I am afraid we're going to have to terminate our agreement," said de Jonggh. "You see, we've heard from Richie."

"And he doesn't want to be found?" said the detective.

"Something like that." Another pause, then, "You will be paid your retainer in full, Mr. Shayne. If you like, I'll bring it to your home."

"When?" said the redhead.

"In half an hour?"

"I'll be there."

That was *that*. Shayne no longer felt anger—he was baffled. Within less than two hours of being hired, he had been ordered off the search for Richie Ireland, first by the police, then by his client's manager or whatever Ramon de Jonggh was in Evelyn Ireland's life. The detective had agreed to meet the man at his apartment, not because he needed the money but because he was curious about Ramon. The redhead wondered what lay behind that sleek, well groomed facade. He wanted another look at the man.

When he walked again through the swinging door into the main room of the cabaret, the uproar had fallen away to a whisper. Standing inside the

foyer across the room was bulking Len Sturgis, flanked by a pair of uniformed members of Miami's Homicide Squad. He spotted the redhead as he emerged and slowly crooked a forefinger to beckon him over.

"Outside," he said when Shayne reached him. They moved to the parking lot and Sturgis said, "Mike, I told you to pack it in. Are you looking for trouble with me?"

"I came in for a nightcap," said the detective. "After all, I already gave you the name of the joint. I wondered what kind of a place it was. Anything wrong with that?"

"Only one thing." The Chief of Detectives' voice was edged with anger. "We just got a tip your boy was here, so we came over and found not him but you."

"Richie Ireland *here?*" Shayne felt like blinking.

"As if you didn't know!"

"Let's not go through *that* again," said the redhead. "Len, the manager told me he had a message for me the moment I walked in. He took me back to the phones and my client told me to drop the case. When I came out, you were here."

Sturgis looked his disbelief, then nodded toward the man with the broken nose and the gardenia, said, "That the man?"

At Shayne's nod, he called

the man over, pulled him aside and questioned him briefly. He said, "Get the hell out of here, Shayne, and stop wasting my time. Go home and tuck yourself in—and stay in!"

"You forgot to read me my rights."

The redhead couldn't resist it, though he should have known better. He could still hear Sturgis's bull-crocodile roars as he got into the Buick and headed out of the parking lot.

His thoughts were not happy as he headed for the apartment hotel on the north bank of the Miami River that had been his home for many years. If there was anything the redhead detested, it was being in a state of confusion that precluded intelligent action. He had seldom, if ever, been more confused than he was at the moment.

Since answering Evelyn Ireland's phone call, he had been given an assignment, then taken off it before he could get even his toes wet. He had Len Sturgis on his back as being in some way involved in the Loretta Thomas murder—and now, if de Jonggh were to be believed, he was about to be paid off for work he had not done.

He told himself that he was well out of it, that the smart thing to do was to take the money and run—or rather

cruise down among the Keys, seeking Marlin rather than a would-be playboy who might or might not be a murderer.

Twelfth Street, as befitted the late hour and the somewhat down-at-heel neighborhood, held its usual quota of parked economy cars, vans and mini-trucks. Among them, the long and glittering Mercedes Custom Sedan stood out like a well thumb. The redhead waved to the occupant visible behind the driver's wheel and pulled in to the curb close to the downramp that led to the parking garage underneath his apartment hotel.

He had already opened the door to step across the street when a pair of high explosive bullets, fired in quick succession, whizzed past his head to *spat* against the trunk of a large palm tree implanted in the sidewalk. Half a second later, the *plop-plop* of a silenced gun reached his ears.

By this time, Shayne was flat on his belly in the street, rolling toward the front of the Buick so as to put the car's length between himself and his unseen attacker. His intent, apart from avoidance of being hit—to get into the Buick's front seat from the sidewalk side to retrieve his fully loaded .45-calibre automatic from its special compartment within

easy reach of the driver's right hand.

Unless his attacker charged him on foot while he was crawling for his gun, Shayne felt sure the steel body of his car would protect him—and no further shots were fired while he retrieved his weapon and slid back the barrel to put the first of ten bullets in the chamber.

Before leaving the car, the detective decided to take a look for his attacker. He slid across the front seat and lifted his head carefully for a quick reconnoiter through the window on the driver's side. As he did so, a powerful motor roared into action and a car somewhere behind him started forward with a screech of rubber, coming pell mell down the street toward the redhead.

Shayne crouched on the seat and lifted his handgun to try a deflection shot as the car roared by—but again the driver surprised him, this time with a well placed shot fired across his chest that ricocheted angrily off the top of the door, causing the redhead to duck down involuntarily.

By the time he had his pistol up once more and ready to fire, the car of his attacker was in the act of turning the corner ahead and disappearing. Shayne did not even have a chance to nail down the make

and model of the car, much less catch its license plate number.

Battling anger at having been made a target, the detective stepped out and crossed the street to the Mercedes. As he expected, Ramon de Jonggh was seated behind the wheel, both of his hands resting on its rim.

He made no response to Shayne's greeting and, for a moment, the redhead thought Evelyn Ireland's whatever-he-was was sleeping. Under the circumstances, he should have known better, but he extended a hand to give de Jonggh's left shoulder a slight shake.

Result—de Jonggh pitched slowly forward until his forehead was resting on the steering wheel. Only then did the detective become aware of the slight trickle of blood that had flowed from a small neat hole in his head, just behind and below his left ear.

The Dutchman was dead as mutton.

Shayne made his way back to his own car, stowing away his gun in his belt, picked up the car telephone to dial Len Sturgis. At the moment, his concern was more with the reaction (quite predictable) of the Chief of Detectives than with either the murderer's victim or with the money he was supposed to have been bringing Shayne.

III

WHEN SHAYNE FINALLY emerged from Headquarters, it was quarter to eight in the morning and all he wanted was to get home, take a long hot shower and turn in. For once, his heart actually sank at the sight of the slouching, cadaverous, unkempt figure of Tim Rourke sprawled on one of the hard wooden benches in the anteroom. When the *Daily News* reporter scrambled awkwardly to his feet as the redhead came out of the interrogation room, the detective mentally kissed slumber good-bye for the immediate future.

As the newsman fell into step beside him, Shayne found some consolation in the fact that his long-time friend and confidant also looked somewhat the worse for wear—with a stubble of beard that matched his own and dark circles that extended halfway to his ears.

"Come on, Mike," he said. "Let's feed our faces. It's on me for a change."

"You or the rag you work for?"

"What's the difference? It's free."

"The hell it is," Shayne growled. "You'll pump me dry as a bone."

"Come on, Mike."

They adjourned to an all-

night eatery close to the river, a place with sawdust on the floor and lumberjack-sized servings, and the detective felt a stir of appetite as his nostrils picked up the aroma of good food and hot coffee. They took a rear table and sipped café royales, heavy with brandy, while they awaited their orders.

"Mike," said the reporter, "how did you get mixed up in the Richie Ireland thing? I was chasing down another angle on the Loretta Thomas murder all night. I didn't get word you were involved until an hour ago when I got back."

Shayne took a healthy pull on his drink, sighed and said, "Tim, I wish to hell I'd never heard of it." He gave Rourke a terse summing up of the past night's happenings, added, "The worst of it is, the police don't believe me—and I damn near don't believe myself by this time. What a night!"

"What did you make of Ramon de Jonggh?"

"Poor bastard!" Shayne shrugged. "I got the impression he was a locked-in character. You got anything on him? I never heard of him until he admitted me to Evelyn Ireland's apartment."

"Locked in is right," said Rourke. "He's one of those you-name-it characters that seem to attach themselves to

women like Evelyn—or maybe it's the other way around. He called himself her personal representative. Anyway, he and the kid were close."

"What have you got on Richie Ireland, Tim—beyond the fact he had a date with the Thomas broad just a bit before she was wasted?"

"They were a red-hot undercover item for months before it happened." The reporter sighed and shook his head. "She had someone big paying her bills, and you can bet it wasn't Richie. He didn't have a dime beyond his allowance and a trust fund income he won't control till he's thirty—if he lives that long."

He paused while their platters were placed in front of them and more café royales ordered, then added, "It always beats me why a broad like Loretta, who's got it made big with some rich sucker, wants to fool around on the side."

"You didn't talk that way when you were younger," the detective reminded him.

"Ah, youth . . ." mumbled Rourke as he began to shovel scrambled eggs and link sausage into his mouth.

Mike Shayne, who had ordered a steak and hashed browns, dug into his own food and found it excellent, not sparing the mound of crisp and ten-

der fried onions on the left of the thick platter.

Only when they had paused to get into their second drink, did the detective say, "Any idea who Big Daddy was?"

"Not a whisper," said the reporter. "What do you think I was trying to chase down last night? All I know is, he has to have plenty of bread. She spent it like it was going out of style."

"What about the kid, Tim—think he killed her?"

"The circumstantial evidence is against him, Mike. He *was* the last person known to have seen her, and he's sure been keeping out of sight since."

"Any record of quarrels?"

Rourke stirred the remnant of his eggs thoughtfully. "Loretta was a feisty broad," he said. "She liked a good knock-down-and-dragout once in awhile—especially when she was loaded. And that was most of the time." A pause, then, "No, nothing special."

"What about the weapon?" the redhead asked.

"It hasn't turned up. But Richie Ireland liked to hunt. He's known to have had two or three shotguns—Abercrombie and Fitch-type stuff."

"Two or three?"

"With a kid like that, there's no sure way of telling. He and his buddies trade their goodies



around—including some of their broads."

"Loretta?"

"Not so you'd notice. Richie had her fenced off as his private preserve—except for Big Daddy, of course. And that seems to have been out of character for both of them. Until she landed her Mr. Big, Loretta

enjoyed what they now call 'an exceedingly active sex life'."

"What we used to call a tramp," the redhead agreed. "But it doesn't sound like much of a case against the kid—unless there's something else."

"There is," said the reporter. "Three years ago, the kid was weekending with a bunch of boys and gals at an estate on one of the keys. One of the girls died and two of the others just missed. It seems somebody fed them Spanish fly for kicks."

"Richie?"

"Nobody's talked. The whole thing was kept under wraps. The girls' parents—the surviving girls' parents—didn't want their precious lambs scarred by publicity. But Richie was ordered to take psychiatric treatment."

Shayne's ears pricked up. He remembered the remark of the bartender at the Golden Mule. He said, "Who's the shrink?"

"None other than Dr. Willard Allerdice himself. Go first class or don't go—even to the nut doctor."

Shayne thought that one over. Dr. Willard Allerdice was probably the most successful, certainly the most celebrated, Doctor of Psychiatry in Miami. When the rich and famous, local or visiting, felt need of unburdening their psyches outside of a church confessional,

five to one it was Dr. Allerdice they went to see.

"Have you talked to him?" Shayne asked.

"Only on the telephone, Mike. Oh, he was nice enough but claimed he was too busy and hardly qualified to reveal any private information about a client. You know—the usual."

Another pause while the reporter mopped up his platter, then, "I hear you got a look at Ramon's killer."

"I got fired on by a gunman in a car who was on the scene shortly afterward," the redhead replied.

"Did you get a look at him?"

"You've got to be kidding!" said the redhead. "It was *dark*, Tim, and he went by me like a bat out of hell, and I was trying to duck anyway. All I can tell you is that, the way the guy had to fire at me and even come close, he had to be left handed."

Rourke dropped his fork with a clatter. Shayne said, "Something the matter, Tim?"

"Richie Ireland," said the reporter. "He's a southpaw, too."

The food revived Shayne considerably and, before going home, he decided to stop by his office on Flagler Street. Lucy Hamilton, poised and trimly attractive as ever, sat behind the receptionist's desk, going through the mail. She regarded

Shayne anxiously as he entered, said, "Michael, you look tired. What happened after you left me?"

"Oh, a lot of things." He didn't feel like running through it again, even with Lucy. He said, "Anything urgent, angel?"

"This lady is waiting to see you." She nodded toward a woman seated in the chair behind the door.

He said, "Good morning—what can I do for you?"

IV

SHE WORE A worn woolen coat, tinted shades that masked most of her face and a kerchief that covered her head. Not until she was seated opposite his desk in the inner office and removed her sunglasses did he recognize her as Evelyn Ireland. Even then, only her incredible lavender eyes declared her identity. The lacquered butterfly of the night before had become a moth.

She made no allusion to the confused and confusing events just past, said, "Mr. Shayne. I want you to find out who killed Ramon."

"Mrs. Ireland, the police are working on it—and I can assure you they're much better equipped than I am to find his murderer. Besides, they have specifically ordered me off."

"You've defied them before," she replied in her husky contralto. "I've checked up on you."

"I have to live with them," he told her. "What makes you think I can find Ramon better than they?"

"Maybe you can't—but I'll feel better about it. Don't worry—I can pay. Did Ramon give your money last night?"

"He didn't have the chance. He was dead before I got home," the redhead told her, rubbing his chin and wishing it were shaved.

She pulled a purse from her plain brown-leather handbag, unsnapped it and emptied its contents on his desktop blotter, leaving a casual cluster of thousand-dollar bills. Gesturing toward them, he said, "Help yourself."

He gestured the money away, said, "If I agree to take on this assignment—and right now, I don't feel much like it—you can settle those details with my secretary. Before I make up my mind, I want to ask you a few questions."

For a moment, she seemed about to explode—but caught herself in time, took a deep breath and subsided, said, "Of course."

"First," he said, eyeing her narrowly, "why the disguise?"

"I thought it would be—more discreet."

"Why—because of the police?"

"Partly," she said. "I don't like the idea of being followed—do you?"

He recognized the turnover tactic, smiled faintly, said, "That depends on who's doing the following—and why. You said 'partly' because of the police. Is there anyone else who might want to check on your movements?"

She took another deep breath. The flare of her nostrils, the rise of fine full bosom beneath the plain brown coat, indicated the extraordinarily attractive woman beneath the deliberately drab exterior.

She said, "Ramon was my closest friend—also my oldest. He was my accountant at the time I divorced Colonel Ireland and has been with me ever since. He was absolutely loyal to me, yet he never encroached on my personal affairs unless I asked his advice. And he was more of a father to my son, heaven knows, than his own father was. I don't know how Richie's going to survive without him."

Shayne thought that over, shifted front, said, "Mrs. Ireland, why did you—or Ramon—ask me to drop the search for your son so soon after asking me to look for him?"

"My son called shortly after

you left the Towers last night, Mr. Shayne. He said he was all right but that someone was after him."

"The police?"

Evelyn Ireland shook her head. "No, not the police. He said for God's sake to get you off his back because he couldn't handle both you and this—somebody else. So I had Ramon head you off—and he was killed in front of your house."

"That," said the redhead, "is hardly news to me. Mrs. Ireland, who is this 'somebody else'?"

"I wish to heaven I knew!" There was no doubting the fervor with which she spoke. "I'm hoping that you, if you find Ramon's killer, will answer that question."

He waited her out. She took another provocative deep breath, said, "Mr. Shayne, this is very hard for me, but Richie was being blackmailed."

"Cantharides?" he said, using the technical term for Spanish fly.

Evelyn Ireland flinched, murmured, "So you know about that. A horrible episode! A teenage prank, really, but it all went wrong."

"Spare yourself the details," Shayne said.

"Thank you—but about six months after it happened, the blackmail began. We'd paid

plenty to keep it all quiet, but at first I thought it was the parents of one of the girls who were poisoned. But they swore it was not, and Ramon was convinced they weren't that sort of people. But the demands kept right on coming and coming and coming.

"Whoever was behind it was clever. As Ramon pointed out, they were large enough to keep us close to broke without actually crippling us."

"What was his hold if the case was hushed up?" the detective asked.

"There were certain details that didn't come out in the official hearing. They would have put Richie behind bars—and I'm certain he could never have taken that without going crazy or killing himself. I may not be the ideal mother, but I love my son too much to let that happen."

"I believe you." There was no denying her sincerity at this point.

She sighed, said, "Then, about six months ago, Richie came into some money—I don't really know from whom or how much. He was very secretive about it, very proud of being able to make the payments himself. And then—Loretta Thomas. Now he's afraid for his life. After what happened to poor Ramon, who can blame

him? So you see why I've come to you like this?"

The detective nodded, although he was far from satisfied. He said, "Does Richie know you're here?"

She shook her head, said, "I shan't tell him if you advise me not to—but I shall feel much better, knowing the celebrated Mike Shayne is looking for Ramon's murderer."

He thought of saying, "What if Richie killed him?"—but decided against it. Instead, he said, "If I do take it on, what if I find him? You know I'll have to inform the police."

The lavender eyes met his green ones full on as Mrs. Ireland rose from the chair. "I don't give a damn what you do as long as you get him."

Shayne thought it over, said, "Very well, Mrs. Ireland, I'll see what I can do. But I'm guaranteeing nothing."

"That's good enough for me."

The redhead ran for Lucy, told her, "Angel, make out a card for Mrs. Ireland. The usual rates," And, to his client, "I'm not billing you for last night. After all . . ."

Evelyn Ireland thanked him and signed the release that served as a contract. She left a thousand dollars for starters. The redhead walked down to the street with her, saw her into the car she was driving, a

modest compact, obviously not new. If the car was out of character for Evelyn Ireland, the Emerald Queen, it fitted her drab disguise perfectly. Standing in the doorway as she drove off, he felt a reluctant admiration. Here, he told himself, was a woman who could both think and function when the chips were down.

His intention was to go home for a shave and shower, but when she pulled away, the redhead caught a flicker of movement further up the block. Another vehicle, a maroon Volkswagon, pulled out as she passed and followed hers. As they reached the intersection, the light went red and both cars were forced to stop.

It took Shayne less than half a minute to get to his own car in the small parking lot and drive it to the street. The light went green as he swung the Buick out onto the pavement, increasing the little motorcade by fifty percent.

The pursuit that followed was, to the redhead, more like a funeral procession than the sort of wild car-chase made famous by the movie version of *The French Connection*, and aped in scores of more recent film productions. The compact Evelyn Ireland was driving moved sedately across the Causeway over Biscayne Bay to

the towering crenelations of the Miami Beach skyline, with the maroon Volkswagon keeping its distance two cars behind, with Shayne's Buick a further three cars back.

Either the Emerald Queen was unaware that she was followed or she didn't give a damn. In any event, she made no effort to shake the dark red beetle on her tail. She turned right when she reached the boulevard, obviously heading for her Beach Towers apartment, and here the detective received his first surprise.

Instead of following her, the Volkswagon turned left, heading north.

This put Shayne in a dilemma. Either the Volkswagon had not been tailing Evelyn at all, or its driver considered the assignment finished. Opting quickly for the latter alternative, the redhead was lucky enough to catch the light on the yellow and swing north after the second car. In case the move to abandon the tail had been caused by discovery that Shayne was following, the detective dropped back two cars further in the hope of relieving the VW driver's mind on that score.

Two more left turns, then a right, put the maroon vehicle back on the Causeway, heading for Miami proper. As before,

the pace was close to lethargic. The redhead dawdled along as, after reaching the city, his quarry headed for a low-rent district of small apartment buildings and parked in front of one of them.

Shayne drove past and pulled in six cars further. In his rear-view mirror, as he parked, he was in time to see a short burly male figure enter the building where he had left the VW. Waiting until he was out of sight, the detective, on a sudden hunch, drew the .45-caliber automatic from its special compartment and put it once more into his belt.

He had no logical reason to expect violence, but instinct, plus the fact two murders had been committed by someone close to the Irelands, caused him to arm himself. He walked slowly back toward the building before which the maroon import stood.

In the entry, he found himself confronted by a row of tarnished brass letter-boxes, each topped by a name and a button doorbell. He frowned as he read the list of apartment lessees—none of the names meant a damn thing to him.

He was about to press one at random, merely to get inside and ask questions, when the front door was opened from within and a voice said, "It's

okay, Mr. Shayne. Come on inside."

It was the night bartender from the Golden Mule. He stood aside for the detective to enter, adding, "Two floors up—left rear." When they got there, he called. "It's okay. It's Mario. I got company."

The door was opened a crack, with the chain still on, and an eye peered through. A sulky voice said, "I told you I don't want to see anybody."

"It's Shayne," Mario replied. "Let us in, dammit!"

Moments later, the chain was withdrawn. The door opened and they went inside. Immediately, the redhead was pinioned from behind and his pistol deftly removed from its belt clip. Only then did the inmate stand back to let the two of them continue.

Shayne recognized Richie Ireland from his pictures—dark, handsome, loose of mouth, but taller than the detective had expected—a good six feet two. He studied the Emerald Queen's son as he turned to Mario and said, "How come he's here?"

"He followed me," the bartender replied. "Your mother went to see him this morning."

Richie turned to Shayne, the pistol against his left thigh, said, "What did she want? I told her to get rid of you."

The detective saw no reason for concealment, said, "She hired me to find Ramon's murderer. I hope I'm not looking at him."

The fury that blazed up in Richie Ireland's dark eyes was so hot that, for a moment, Shayne thought the young man was going to try to shoot him right then. Shifting his weight forward onto the balls of his feet, the redhead prepared to take counter measures. Mario uttered a warning cry, said, "For Chrissakes, Richie—no!"

Slowly, Richie's rage subsided. He took a shuddering breath before eyeing the detective accusingly and saying, "Now why would you say a thing like that, Shayne? I loved Ramon de Jonggh like my own father—*more*. Mother must have told you, so why say it."

Shayne spoke quietly, "Richie, the man who killed de Jonggh last night outside my apartment building took a shot at me. No, I didn't get a look at him—but he was left-handed."

"So are millions of other people," said Mario stoutly.

"I know." Shayne spoke quietly. "I simply wanted to test his reaction."

"Come on into the kitchen," said the bartender. "I could use a drink."

Shayne did not protest. Under the circumstances, since

Richie had his handgun, protest of any sort seemed unwise. For another, the detective decided he could *use* a drink. The morning, like the night preceding it, had been long and wearing, and the effect of the *café royales* indulged in at Tim Rourke's expense earlier had long since worn off.

He sat at a round kitchen table with Richie opposite him, still holding the gun, while Mario busied himself mixing the drinks. To Shayne, the bartender said over his shoulder, "Sorry, I got no Martell, Mike, but I have some homemade grappa that might surprise you."

The grappe did surprise him. It was sharper than the smooth cognac that was his staple, but it had body, excellent bouquet and a good deal more kick than its commercial rivals. Feeling the impact of the first swallow in his veins, the detective decided to proceed with caution.

"How'd you like it?" Mario asked.

"Excellent," said the redhead. "Did you make it yourself?"

"Not a chance, Mike." Mario lifted his glass of wine. "I gotta uncle up near Sarasota who cooks it in his back yard. He sends me a jug for Christmas, and—"

"What'd you think of mom?" Richie Ireland asked suddenly.



Shayne assembled his wits with a wrench, said, "My impressions are of a very beautiful, very strong-willed woman used to having her own way— incidentally one who seems to love you very much."

His tongue felt thick as he said "incidentally" and he caught Richie sending Mario a sidelong look, wondered what it meant. The quick lift the grappa had given him became a rapidly spinning coal-chute with no discernable bottom, and he felt himself slipping down into it, growing increasingly helpless as it engulfed him. His field of vision narrowed to pinpoint dimensions, then faded out entirely.

V

SHAYNE AWOKE from an uncomfortable dream of being trapped underwater to find himself bathed in sweat. He had slept unmolested at Mario's kitchen table with his head resting on the back of his right wrist. The roof of his mouth tasted like the disposal bin of a chemical

factory and the stubble of his jaws felt at least a quarter inch long.

Through the narrow view afforded by the room's one window, he could catch a glimpse of sunset sky to the west. Somewhere nearby a phone was ringing. *Jesus!* he thought. *I must have slept all afternoon.*

He lurched to his feet, looked around for the source of the repeated rings, finally found the instrument on a small battered table in the bed-sitting room that, with a towel-draped bath, was the apartment's only other chamber. When he picked up the phone, all he got was a dial tone.

Resting his knuckles on the table to steady himself, he came slowly wide awake and wished he hadn't as awareness of how he had been suckered by Mario and Richie arose within him. He was close to panic as he checked his pockets, discov-

ered that he had been stripped of wallet and car keys as well as of his automatic.

His first impulse was to call Police Headquarters and report the thefts—but even as his fingers reached for the handset, he paused. He knew he could not face the ridicule that would inevitably ensue when Len Sturgis and others of his friends on the force learned how completely he had been taken by a couple of kids.

He called his office, but there was no answer. Lucy had locked up and gone for the day. A glance at his wristwatch informed him that it was five minutes past seven. Hoping against hope that he would catch her at home, he dialed his secretary's number. His relief when she answered was almost sickening.

"Michael," she said. "What happened? You could have called!"

"Oh, no I couldn't, I'll tell you why later. Now listen. Angel, I need your help." He gave her the address of Mario's apartment, which fortunately he remembered, asked her to pick him up there."

"I have a date for the movies," she replied, "with Anabelle Williams."

"Sorry," he said, "but I'm stranded and probably in trouble."

"I'll be there as soon as I can," she replied. "And, Mike, is it bad?"

"I don't know yet," he replied. "Could be, though."

Hanging up, he barely restrained an impulse to place calls to Tokyo, London and other far places and charge them to Mario's bill, decided both that it was too small a revenge for what the kids had done to him and that there would probably not be time to run up enough charges to make it worth while before Lucy got there.

As he made his way, still somewhat rocky, down the sleazy staircase, he began to consider the possibilities of what Mario and Richie Ireland might be doing with his car, his wallet and, above all, with his Colt .45. His speculations were not assuring.

He had to wait only twelve minutes for Lucy's arrival behind the wheel of her trim sapphire blue compact. She took one look at him and said, "Michael, you look *terrible!* Why didn't you shave?"

"Didn't have time," he replied. "If you'll take me home, though, I will."

While he scraped off his whiskers, showered, rubbed down and changed into fresh clothes, she busied herself in the small kitchen. When he

emerged, feeling famished but otherwise almost a new man, she had the Martell on the coffee table along with a small bucket of ice and two tall glasses, and the pleasant aroma of broiling top sirloin from the kitchen tickled his nostrils. It had been a long time since breakfast with Tim Rourke that morning.

Thinking of Rourke, he picked up the phone after pouring himself a half-tumbler of cognac and filling it the rest of the way with ice. He had some difficulty in getting through to the reporter, who was en route to The Beef House, his regular dining place.

Replacing the handset in frustration, he called to Lucy in the kitchen, "Any calls today I should know about?"

"Mrs. Ireland is trying to get you. But she'll be out till midnight," Lucy called back.

Shayne considered the probabilities dourly, said, "Angel, one will get you five she wants to fire me again."

"What for?" Lucy appeared in the doorway, carrying a spatula and masked from neck to ankles by the detective's barbecue apron. "Is she crazy?"

"Not bloody likely," said Shayne. "But I'm beginning to think another member of her family is. Anyone else call?"

"A Doctor Allerdice. He

called twice. He wants to hear from you after ten."

"Looks like I'm in for a busy evening," said the detective. Then, "Angel, you really *are* an angel!"

This, as Lucy reappeared bearing one of Shayne's king-sized sizzling platters in its wooden tray, laden with two ten-ounce sirloin strippers from the freezer, flanked by a small mountain of French fries on one side and a large beef-steak tomato on the other, the tomato split and grilled beneath a blanket of Romano cheese.

"Aren't you eating, Angel?" he asked as she sank into the somewhat worn but comfortable armchair across the table.

"I ate early because of the movie I'm not going to," she replied. "You look like a new man, Michael. What *happened* to you today?"

In the act of slicing off a sizable chunk from one of the blood-rare steaks, Shayne looked up to say, "Angel, right now I don't want to talk about it. Will you try for Tim at The Beef House? He was on his way there when I called the News."

"I ought to charge you overtime," she told him as she dialed the restaurant.

Moments later, she handed him the phone, saying, "I got him."

After brief insulting pleasantries, Shayne gave the reporter a succinct account of what had happened to him since breakfast. Rourke listened, said, "For God's sake, Mike, you can't leave those kids wandering around loose with your gun and car and wallet. You're asking for a setup!"

"I know, dammit!" said the redhead.

"You'd better call Will Gentry, or Len Sturgis and report it."

"I'll never hear the last of it, but you're right. But before I do, what have you come up with? Anything on poor de Jonggh?"

"Not a hell of a lot. Before he latched onto Evelyn Ireland, he seems to have been something of a mystery. He handled only personal accounts like hers—damned few, but big ones. His rep was excellent from the little I've been able to root out—and that's damned little."

"There's some mystery, too, about whether he had a C.P.A.'s license—and another about his birth and citizenship. He turned up in New York after the big war. The consensus is he's of Dutch ancestry—maybe the East Indies. The news services are digging into it."

"Keep on it," said Shayne. "I'll call Will Gentry now."

"I admire your courage, Mike."

"Not mine—Lucy's," said the redhead, hanging up and handing her the phone.

She had been sitting there, bursting to talk, now said as she took the phone in her lap, "Do you mean to say those damned kids stole your car?"

"And my gun and my wallet," He told her. "Also, there's a little matter of a drink of alleged grappa doctored with something thoroughly illegal called a Mickey Finn."

"Michael!" she cried. "What are you going to do?"

"I'm going to finish this perfectly fabulous food while you call Will Gentry's office and report the thefts. You're going to tell them I'm still sick as a dog. Then you're going to rent me a car, since you're the only one of us with credentials. Then we're going to watch the tube until nine-thirty. Then I'm going to see Dr. Allerdice."

She regarded him steadily for a long moment, then began to dial. While she talked, Shayne went back to his steak and potatoes and tomato, demolishing them swiftly and methodically, pretending not to listen to her call.

He suppressed a wince as Lucy, after explaining her employer's predicament to Chief of Miami Police Gentry himself,

said, "You want me to tell him he'd better turn in his license and apply for early Social Security?" Then, after another pause, "No, he can't talk now, Chief. He's resting." And finally, "Yes, Chief, I'll give him your message. You're putting out an A.P.B. for his missing brains. Got it."

Hanging up, she looked at him, her lips twitching, said, "It's nice to have friends when you're in trouble."

"Some *friends!*!" he growled. "Dammit, it could have happened to anyone. It's not funny!"

"I know it, Michael." Her tone was warm with sympathy. "But in a way it is funny."

He grimaced, said, "I suppose it is, to a sadist."

"Anyway," she soothed, "now that it's reported, you won't have any trouble with the police."

"Thanks, Angel, for that—but I still get the jimmies when I think of those two wildballs on the loose with my gun. After all, Richie's a prime suspect in the Loretta Thomas murder. And this caper of his doesn't make him look any better."

"Do you really think he killed her—and de Jonggh?"

Shayne scowled, said, "It's still open season on guesses."

"But his mother doesn't think so—you remember what she

told you this morning about his being more than a father to him than his own father."

"You were listening in." His tone was accusing.

"Of course, Michael. We don't get the Emerald Queen for a client every day. I was curious."

"A mother is seldom impartial where her chick is concerned," the detective told her. Then his tone grew thoughtful, more abstract. "And there's something else—thanks for bringing up de Jonggh and the kid."

"Michael, you're *onto* something!" she said. "What is it?"

"Can't tell you yet—it's probably nothing but my imagination. Still . . ." He let it hang.

"Tell me, Michael. I'm dying of curiosity."

"Not yet." He shook his head firmly. "I've already made enough of a fool of myself over this case without risking another fall. Better call the car rental people and get me some wheels."

"How about a passionate pink hearse, honey?"

"Angel, you're sick."

Lucy began to dial . . .

VI

WHEN SHAYNE PARKED in front of the expensive looking glass brick and granite modern mansion that Dr. Willard Allerdice

called home, he was driving a black Mercedes. He was wearing his shoulder rig, carrying his second-favorite handgun, a custom made Magnum .380 Police Special.

Although the rental car was a magnificently tuned vehicle, he would have much preferred to be driving his own Buick with its special telephone and other equipment. As he got out of the car, he spotted the police sedan parked unobtrusively, off the driveway, under the shade of a cluster of drooping palms.

Dr. Allerdice answered his ring in person. The psychiatrist looked younger than his press and television image although lines at the corners of his mouth and eyes suggested extreme tension.

He said, "Thanks for your promptness, Mr. Shayne. Come on in."

Despite its obvious expense, there was an austerity about the psychiatrist's mansion that was in contrast to his red-and-black Royal Stuart plaid dinner jacket with matching trews and a cascading ruffled Shantung silk shirt. The detective had a momentary illusion that he was facing a haberdashery store show window dummy.

"You wanted to see me, Doctor?" was all he could think of to say.

"Of course. Come on into my

study. Would you care for a drink?"

His voice was melodious, low pitched, rapid in delivery. Following him to his den. Shayne wondered how you went about out-psyching a psychiatrist. No further words were spoken until the drinks were poured and both men seated. The detective had half-expected to see a couch in one corner, but there was none.

Putting down his glass after reducing its contents considerably, Dr. Allerdice said, "Shayne, I'm in danger of my life."

"I presume you have cause," said the redhead, marvelling at the stilted sound of his own stilted words.

"I would hardly have asked to see you if I hadn't," the psychiatrist said.

"You already have security, Doctor."

"You noticed the police outside, of course." Allerdice stroked his clean-shaven chin before adding, "I'd feel a lot safer with—more personal protection. Not that the Miami police aren't efficient—they are. But I don't want them with me twenty-four hours a day. Some of my patients . . ." He gestured expressively to indicate their distaste.

"I'm sorry," said Shayne. "I'm already hired. Since I'm a one-

detective agency. I can only serve one client at a time."

"You can name your own fee," the psychiatrist told him. "Surely—"

The redhead interrupted. "Is it Richie Ireland?"

Dr. Allerdice recoiled from Shayne's directness as if from a blow. Then he half-smiled, said, "With a man of your reputation, I should have known." Then he nodded.

"Has he threatened you?"

"He has already accomplished that with two murders. Shayne.

"You have evidence?" said the detective.

Dr. Allerdice hesitated, then said, "I shouldn't reveal this, I suppose, since you're not in my employ. But it will all inevitably come out. Loretta Thomas was my mistress."

Shayne's left eyebrow rose a notch. He wondered why Allerdice *was* revealing this confidence, but merely said, "I understand she was—expensive."

"She was worth every penny I spent on her—and more, much more. Shayne, Loretta Thomas was the most beautiful human being I have had the fortune to know. And now she's wiped out—and by a spoiled brat of an over-aged youth."

"I understand you had young Ireland under treatment," the detective said.

"I did—following a certain



LUCY HAMILTON

unfortunate incident I am not free to discuss."

Shayne suppressed an impulse to say, "Why not—when it's already semi-public knowledge?" Instead, he said, "What about Richie—did you find him sane?"

"Sane?" The psychiatrist pondered the word before saying, "I would have said so until Loretta was murdered. As sane as any spoiled brat with an over-ambitious, over-sexed mother like his. I found paranoid symptoms, of course,

but of themselves these are neither unusual nor especially dangerous—unless something occurs to trigger them over the borderline of the psychotic."

"You think this occurred, Doctor?"

"Obviously." Another eloquent gesture, the gesture a man accustomed to addressing audiences. "Finding that trigger is the chief reason I want to hire you, Shayne?"

"Why me? The police have—"

"Because you have the reputation of being the ablest and most honest private detective in Florida," Dr. Allerdice replied. "You can interpret your findings as the police cannot—perhaps because you are not a victim of routine and a closed point of view."

Then, leaning forward, "I don't want young Ireland to claim a third victim. I especially don't want that victim to be me."

"He was jealous of you?"

"Of course!" This with another sweeping gesture. "Loretta and I used to laugh about his pitiful efforts to go to bed with her—cruel, perhaps, but understandable under the circumstances. She used to call him 'young Mr. Adenoids'."

"Why do you think he killed her, Doctor?"

"I don't know. Probably no one will ever know since poor

Loretta can no longer talk. But I'm going to try to find out, whether you help me or not."

"What about Ramon de Jonggh?"

Another shrug with outspread arms. "I knew Ramon, of course. He handled my books for a while. An able man. His death is a tragedy, too, of course, although I fear I have not been able to give it the time I should."

"Understandable," said Shayne. "Why do you suppose he was murdered?"

Another shrug, then, "Unless it was because the boy thought he was going to inform on him to you. I can hardly guess. That occurred to you, of course."

"Of course," said the detective. His glass was empty and he refused the psychiatrist's offer of another drink. He had enough to think about already.

At the study door, he said, "Doctor, in case I should find myself free, would you give me a number I can call?"

"Of course." The psychiatrist crossed to his desk and scribbled briefly on a card, handed it to Shayne. "This is my private answering service," he said. "You can reach me twenty-four hours a day." He handed Shayne the card, added, "By the way, I'll be on television Saturday night—taped, of course, but if you're interested."

"I'll watch it if I can," the detective promised, stowing the card in a jacket pocket since he was without a wallet. As he walked to the rented Mercedes outside, he found himself almost wishing Dr. Allerdice weren't right handed. *What a bastard!* he thought. *Even for a shrink!*

He waved to the police in their car as he turned around in the driveway.

VII

IT WAS TWELVE past midnight when Evelyn Ireland again admitted Mike Shayne to her terrace apartment in the Beach Towers. Resplendent and costly as the living room was, it was washed out by the glitter of the dark-blonde beauty with the incredible lavender eyes.

Her white satin evening gown was not in itself spectacular—but it was cunningly devised to emphasize every plus figure of her fabulous greyhound figure, as well as the nabob's fortune in emeralds that adorned both gown and wearer. They were not overwhelming in number, but their size, cut and brilliance would have washed out any less beautiful woman.

She wore no necklace but the clip adorning the neck of her gown weighed, in Shayne's es-

timation, at least forty karats of glowing green in square cut. Her earrings were pear-shaped and of a good ten karats each, while the brilliant dark green stone that held her green satin sash in place added a good thirty more. A single pear-shaped stone on the fourth finger of either hand must have increased the total by another twelve to fifteen karats apiece.

Staring at her in wonderment, the detective said, "Aren't you afraid they'll be stolen?"

"I'm not a complete fool, Mr. Shayne," she replied. "The real ones are in the vault at the bank. My insurance company sees to that—and to the fact the underworld knows it. I'm quite safe, thank you."

She waved toward the bar in the corner, said, "Help yourself—is it Mike? Then tell me what progress you've made."

He poured a Martell and water, sat down across the coffee table from her, said, "I'm a little surprised at your going out at a time like this."

She dismissed his thought with an elegant gesture, replied, "If it weren't a charity, I believe I . . ." She let it hang, leaned toward for a light, added, "What have you learned today?"

"That your son and his pal

Mario are a pair of very naughty boys." He decided against telling her how he had been drugged and ripped off, said, "Have you heard from him?"

"Not today. I'm exceedingly worried." Her forehead furrowed—on her even wrinkles looked well. "Have you talked to him?"

"Only briefly," he said. "Mostly he wanted to know about you?"

"Mike," she said, "do you think he did what the police seem to think he did? As his mother, I can't tell you how much it costs me to ask that question."

"I understand, Mrs. Ireland."

"Evelyn, please."

"Okay, Evelyn. Do I think he murdered Loretta Thomas and de Jonggh? I'm damned if I know. But he's an undisciplined young man with paranoid-psychotic tendencies according to Dr. Allerdice."

"That charlatan!" Her tone was low, controlled, but packed with venom.

"Mrs. Ireland—Evelyn—you can fire me if you wish, but I'm damned if I think I've been of much help on this case. What's more, I don't see how I can be of help until a big hole in it is filled."

"What's that?"

"Ramon de Jonggh. I've put

out lines on him but nobody seems to know much about him. I wonder if you could fill me in on at least part of it. Mind you, I liked the man and I'd be glad to nail his murderer if the police don't do it first."

"Poor Ramon . . ." Her mouth softened sadly as she savored some private memory. "He and I were—very close friends. If I can help you, of course."

"To begin with, who and what was he?"

"Ramon?" she countered. "Ramon was a blackmailer."

The forthright admission momentarily stopped Shayne cold. Then he rallied and said, "Do you mean it was he who was blackmailing Richie?"

"Hardly. He was also, as I have told you, a close and dear friend of my son and myself. He and Richie were *very* close, like father and son. No, I know—knew—Ramon. He would never have done that. The only reason he asked me to dismiss you last night was for fear you might come up with something damaging against Richie."

"You mean Ramon suspected him of murdering Loretta Thomas?"

"Ramon was not a simple man."

She told the detective something of the dead man's background. His mother had been Spanish, his father a

member of an old Dutch-Colonial family on Sumatra. He had been educated in Amsterdam and Switzerland to be a banker, but his family had been casualties of the Second World War and the disorders that followed it in the East Indies. Ramon had found himself forced to live by his wits and had prospered, apparently both as a personal accountant and in his more profitable sideline.

He and Evelyn Ireland—then a none-too-successful young actress and model—had met in New York, had found one another mutually useful, had ultimately fallen in love.

"It was Ramon," she said, "who introduced me to Colonel Ireland, and everything else followed—Richie and all this." She glanced around the luxury apartment and tapped one of her rings with the middle finger of the other hand, added, "Right now, with Ramon dead and Richie in trouble, it doesn't seem worth it."

Shayne let that pass, said, "You called Ramon a blackmailer. Do you know how he operated?"

She passed a glittering hand over her face before replying. "He was skilled in money, Mike. If things had gone differently, he would have been a great banker. But there was a scandal in his own past that



made him an outlaw in financial circles. A speculation that went wrong, perhaps a murder—he never talked of it."

"So he preyed on monied people . . ." The detective let it hang.

"He had a talent for collecting information—people talked to him. And he used his financial gifts to discover exactly how much a client could pay. He never bled anyone white. He used to say, 'I nibble but I never bite too deeply.'"

"Where did he get his information?"

"I don't know."

"Did he live here?" Shayne asked.

"Hardly." She shook her head. "He had an apartment in Miami."

"I know." That much the redhead had learned the night before, during his long session at Headquarters. It would be sealed up tight by the police until the murder investigation was complete. He felt at a loose end.

"I'd give a lot to know who or what his sources were," Shayne said. "You have *no* idea, Evelyn—no hideout where he might have kept information?"

The lavender eyes brightened. "Mike, there's one possibility. We used to meet privately once in a while. Here, it was impossible, of course, with so many attendants around and Richie coming in and out. And his apartment was too exposed. He never wanted it known we were—well, lovers. He was afraid for my reputation."

"Where was it?" the detective asked. "I'd like to take a look at it, on the off-chance . . ."

"You'd never find it." She rose, began quietly stripping off her imitation emeralds. I'll have to show you. It won't take me long to change."

She joined him ten minutes later, wearing a swagger black velvet belted jacket over a pair of dark slacks, her hair bound in a dark silk kerchief. Shayne noted that, even thus unadorned, she remained a startlingly beautiful woman.

"We might as well take my car," he told her as they walked to the elevator. "You're paying for it."

When they drew up in front of a link steel gate outside of an unlighted driveway, the detective realized that he would not have found the address easily without her direction. It lay on a winding road in a formerly opulent section of Miami that had fallen into decay. Pulling a key ring from her jacket pocket, Evelyn Ireland said, "Wait here, while I unlock the gate."

She got out, moved to it, opened it, then swiftly returned. "That's strange," she said as she slid onto the car seat. "It was unlocked." She added. "It's never unlocked at night. There's no security patrol any more."

Shayne switched off his headlamps, waited for his eyes to grow accustomed to the darkness.

"Why did you do that?" she asked.

"If there's anyone else inside, there's no point in telegraphing the fact we're here," he told her. "Remember, a man and a woman have been murdered."

He drove cautiously into a dark tunnel of a driveway canopied with pines through whose fronds only an occasional star twinkled. There was not even moonlight to help them.

The smooth running Mercedes made very little noise as he held it to a virtual crawl.

"Turn left," she said softly as the bulk of a large house loomed in front of them. Then, when they had bypassed it, "Left again."

Moments later, Shayne found their progress blocked by the rear of another car. His eyes now used to the darkness, he recognized the back of his own Buick. "*Son of a bitch!*" he muttered. And, to Evelyn, "Stay right here while I reconnoiter."

VIII *

MIKE SHAYNE SLIPPED SILENTLY out of the Mercedes, drawing the Magnum from his shoulder rig as he did so and, using his own car for cover, scouted the position. When he reached the driver's side, he thrust a hand through the open window and, finding the keys in the ignition block, pulled them out and stowed them in his own pocket.

Nobody was going to drive the stolen Buick one mile further unless it was Shayne himself.

If he was relieved at finding the missing vehicle, its presence here suggested more immediate problems. Peering over its hood, he made out a smaller dwelling, evidently an estate

cottage. As he watched, he could see a fitful flicker of light through the windows. Somebody inside was evidently using a flashlight. Toward the rear, well inside, he made out a deeper glow that suggested a fire. His nostrils caught the acrid smell of smoke.

Leaving the shelter of the Buick, he moved silently toward the front door of the cottage, discovered it was open as he neared it. He stepped forward to enter and his left foot crunched on a piece of glass. The snapping sound it made as it broke sounded like the crack of a cannon.

"*Damn!*" he muttered, stepping to the side of the door, where the unmown grass offered more silent footing.

The flashlight went out, though the deeper glow remained and Shayne, peering through a window, saw the shadow of someone move across in front of it. Then soft footfalls sounded, coming closer and a voice, almost in his ear, said, "Who's out there?"

Shayne recognized it—the voice was that of Mario, the Golden Mule bartender who had slipped him the mickey that morning. This, he thought, was going to be a pleasure.

Aiming the Magnum at the door, he said, "All right, Mario, drop whatever you're holding

and come out with your hands locked behind your neck."

There was silence. Then Mario said, "Damn you, Shayne!"

He heard the crack of his own automatic and a bullet whined past, several feet away from him, to thud into the spongy trunk of a palm behind him. Shayne made the Magnum leap twice in reply, not aiming, for there was no target, hoping the noise would make Mario surrender.

It did no such thing and there was a stalemate while the fire in the rear of the cottage continued to grow in size. Shayne did not wish to circle the cottage lest he expose Evelyn Ireland to attack if the bartender opted to sortie while he was in the rear of the house. If he went in the front, he not only stood a good chance of being cut down but, again, Mario might escape by the rear and circle to threaten the Emerald Queen.

At least, he thought, thanks to the Mercedes, he had escape by car blocked.

He moved cautiously to the shelter of a thick-trunked palm on his left, giving him a wider range of vision covering the scene—only to feel the muzzle of a gun prodding his right kidney.

"Drop it, Shayne," said Richie

Ireland's voice, "or I swear I'll kill you."

This was one misfortune too many. The cold anger he had been nursing, since he awoke to realize what these two young men had done to him, erupted into white heat. He jabbed backward with his right elbow and spung to the left as he did so. The .45 blasted the night around them but the slug whined harmlessly past and he brought the barrel of the Magnum down on Richie Ireland's right wrist with a vicious chopping motion.

Ireland uttered a yelp of pain as the pistol fell from his fingers and the detective swung a roundhouse left at the young man's diaphragm, hoping to knock the wind out of him and render him temporarily helpless. But his opponent staggered as he swung and the blow landed high and wide on his left ribcage—still hard enough to elicit another yelp of anguish.

Suddenly headlights, though partially blocked by the detective's Buick, lighted the scene as Evelyn switched on the lamps of the Mercedes. Her voice cried, "Richie, come here! Mike, don't kill him!"

A bullet cracked into the tree close to Shayne's head and he dropped to all fours and grabbed for the dropped .45 with his

left hand. By the time he got it, Richie was darting around the silhouetted Buick toward the Mercedes parked behind it.

Remaining low, Shayne looked to his left, saw Mario streak from the cottage, holding a gun in his hand. So great was the redhead's anger that he wanted to shoot the Mickey Finn artist then and there—but the proddings of experience and wisdom caused him to restrain his itching trigger finger.

A dead Mario at this point would be of little help in solving the case. What he wanted was a look inside the cottage before it was consumed by flames. So he remained where he was, while the Mercedes, with Evelyn at the wheel, backed clear of the Buick, turned around and headed outward. He watched it till its twin taillights disappeared.

Then he went inside the cottage. By the glimmer of flame, he spotted a light switch inside the door, turned it on. The interior was comfortably, even luxuriously, furnished. If this were the late Ramon de Jonggh's hideout, it represented no compromise with the Spartan way of life.

The fire was in the study, where a mass of papers had been taken from a filing cabinet against a side wall, dumped on the carpet and ig-

nited. The fire had already eaten away half of the deep pile rug and was charring the wooden floor beneath. Shayne found a bucket by the back door, filled it at a faucet and extinguished the blaze with three trips.

Though the fire itself had not taken hold, it was surprisingly destructive where it counted. Of the two dozen folders on the floor, all but a few bits and pieces were either charred or burned to ash. But the few scraps still legible caused the detective to tug at his left earlobe. He did not recognize all of the seven names he deciphered, but four of them were sufficiently prominent to suggest that scandal spared no man—and no woman.

Again, Shayne wondered how and where de Jonggh had obtained whatever damaging information he possessed about such persons. For these were the rich and the mighty indeed. And he wondered at the size of the late blackmailer's bank account. His quarters, while luxurious, were hardly Lucullan in lavishness.

He wondered, too, at the coincidence of Evelyn's bringing him here just as the young men were committing their attempted arson. Had she expected them to be where they were at that particular mo-

ment? No, he decided, that was just a little too pat. Nor had she anything to gain by it. If the kids *had* burned the isolated cottage down with its damning information, it was about ninety-eight to one they'd have gotten away with it clean.

After all, neither was a suspected or convicted arsonist in the police files.

What a balluxed up bitch of a case! he thought and wondered if his client would continue his employment. He went back to the front room, spotted the cartridge case on the floor where Mario had fired the first shot at him. From its location, he must have been standing to the right of the opening, using its jamb for shelter against counter-fire—which meant he must have been firing with his left hand.

He saw again the swift passage of the car that contained de Jonggh's murderer as it swept past his own parked vehicle, visualized the bark and flash of the pistol, that had to be fired left handed across the steering wheel to have taken the direction it did.

One southpaw was not enough. Now he had two of them. It was time, he decided, he had a reckoning with the kids. Slowly, after turning out the cottage lights, he returned to the Buick. At least, he

thought, he had recovered his car and his Colt. Since he was wearing the Magnum rig, he placed the .45 in the special floor compartment and turned the ignition on.

The motor responded with its familiar powerful thrum and he backed around and headed out through the driveway. With headlights on, it was easy going. He reached for the car phone, then hesitated, realizing that it was much too soon for Evelyn and her two precious charges to have gotten back to the Beach Towers—if, indeed, that was where they were headed. By the dashboard clock, it was two thirty-five.

Apparently, the kids had not damaged the Buick, though Shayne determined to get a thorough checkup at the earliest opportunity, just in case. If the damned young fools drove as wildly as they did everything else, there was no telling what damage they might have started.

He decided to go home and turn in for the night. It was unlikely that these young men would commit any further crimes, and their latest—destruction of de Jonggh's files—was almost a plus. Still, there were those two left hands. And, if either or both of them was a murderer ...

He took a left turn as he

headed south and worked back toward the Causeway. He'd have it out with them right now. He knew himself too well to believe he would sleep soundly with two potential murderers for whom he felt partially responsible at large.

Besides, there was still his personal grudge to settle with them.

He was almost to the Causeway across the bay when he heard the growl of a siren and saw the flashing lights on his tail and pulled over.

"Oh, no!" he moaned as the enormity of his own situation overcame him. He was driving a stolen car without a license or other identification and, worse, he was armed and without a permit.

Apart from the inconvenience, Len Sturgis and Will Gentry were going to die laughing!

IX

THE CHIEF OF DETECTIVES regarded Mike Shayne almost paternally across his desk, said, "I ought to be red hot about you right now, Mike, but you've made such an ass of yourself this time I almost feel sorry for you."

"Save it, Len," said the redhead. "You don't feel one tenth as sorry for me as I do."



"The great Mike Shayne spending the night in a precinct cell for stealing his own car! And being charged for toting a gun without a permit—his own gun! When Gentry hears about this, he'll split a gut."

"I won't tell him if you won't," the redhead said with a feeble effort at humor.

"I won't have to," Sturgis replied. "It's all over town."

"Len," said Shayne to change the subject, "what about the kids? Are they still at large?"

A furrow creased the Chief of Detectives' forehead. Reluctantly, he said, "According to the latest report, they are. And so's your client."

"My former client," the redhead replied. "I called it quits while I was sitting in that sta-

tion house cell. Right now, I don't give a damn who does what to who or who pays for it—as long as it's not me."

"It's a weird one, all right," Sturgis conceded. "I can understand a kid like young Ireland killed a broad—but wasting a man he loved like his father . . . That's where I hit a stone wall."

"Maybe he didn't do it," said Shayne, doubts beginning to nag at him again. "Maybe it was the other kid—Mario."

"Unlikely, Mike—damned unlikely. Find me a motive and I might buy it—*might*, I said. But we've got too much on young Ireland now. And with his past record . . ."

"I know," said Shayne. "Richie seems to be begging for an M-one conviction. Somehow, it doesn't make sense."

"Murder seldom does," Sturgis replied. "We'll know more after we question him."

"You haven't caught him yet," said the redhead.

"Don't you start rubbing it in. We will—make book on that."

"Len, may I ask a question?"

"Go ahead. You will anyway."

"It's about de Jonggh," said Shayne. "How were his finances?"

Sturgis looked at the redhead warily, then shrugged his massive shoulders and said, "They

were okay—nothing to get excited about, but he had quite a few thou in his kick."

"You sure you got all of it tabbed?"

"We've impounded his checking account, his savings accounts—two of them—his safety deposit box. We've checked out his tax records both with Tallahassee and the I.R.S.—he was clean as a whistle with them. His assets in cash and bonds ran to a bit over a hundred gees."

Shayne scowled at the carpet, said without looking up, "Len, what about a Swiss number? Any chance of that? From my information, he should have been loaded, but heavy."

"He had a Swiss account. We've already had it checked out. They were very cooperative for once. Just over thirty thou in Swiss francs—it's included in the total I gave you."

The redhead's puzzlement increased as he thought of the names he had seen in the charred papers at the cottage. It was all very well for de Jonggh to have followed a policy of "nibble but don't bite"—still, if he were deriving income from persons of such great wealth, he should have had larger nibbles.

He decided to let it pass. He had not informed the police of the blackmail angle, since he

detested the thought of putting the glare of publicity on the sins of people who had been on the hook, to keep them quiet for so long. Nor did he intend to reveal the angle now.

Sturgis said, "What makes you think de Jonggh ought to be richer, Mike?"

"I dunno." The redhead stalled. Then, "What do you plan to do with Evelyn Ireland when and if you manage to get hold of her?"

"When, not if!" The Chief of Detectives was emphatic. Then, "We'll question her for a bit, then probably let her go—unless she kills somebody first. After all, what can you do but reap a harvest of grief when you try to penalize a mother for helping her son out of a jam—a woman as spectacular as the Emerald Queen, too? You in love with her, Mike?"

Shayne shook his red head. "No. I don't think so. But she's damnable likeable. Don't tell Lucy I said that."

"Be good, and I won't." Sturgis shook his massive trunk like a shaggy dog emerging from the ocean as he rose and added, "Now get the hell out of here, Mike, and let me get on with police business. By the way, I'm thinking of ordering a plaque for that cell you spent the night in at the station house. How would *Mike Shayne*

Slept Here look in raised bronze letters?"

"You can go to hell, Len," said Shayne, wishing he had managed to come up with a better report. But his wit was at a low ebb after the two nights and the intervening day he had endured. It was past eleven a.m. by the clock above Sturgis's desk, and he wanted some coffee.

After refreshing himself at a Big Mac joint, he drove to the office. To his surprise, Tim Rourke was waiting there with Lucy. They regarded him curiously when he walked in, as if wondering whether he had sprouted antlers during the night.

"Is it true, Mike?" the reporter asked him while he stood briefly in the door of the inner office.

Lucy said, "That you spent the night in jail for stealing your own car and driving without a license?"

"So help me . . ." said Shayne fervently. "If anyone else brings it up, I'll wring his neck and launder it."

"Better get used to it, baby," the reporter said. "The *Herald* ran a page-three story on it, so we had to run one, too."

"That figures." Shayne spun his hat onto the tree in the corner and sank into the chair behind his desk. He looked up

at Tim Rourke, who had followed him in and perched on a corner of the desk, said; "What's *really* on your mind, man?"

"*You are,*" the reporter replied. "I want to be sure you're not losing your marbles."

"What makes you say that?"

"The way you've been behaving the last few days—getting *t.o.*'ed by a couple of kids and your car lifted and all that—and then being pinched for driving it."

"Tim," the redhead said wearily, "it's not that *I've* been doing anything crazy, it's that crazy things have been happening to me."

"You can say *that* again!" Lucy stood in the doorway, added, "It's the Emerald Queen again."

Shayne actually made a grab for the phone, so anxious was he to tell Evelyn off. But before he could get a word in edgewise, that husky contralto said, "Mike I'm so damned sorry about what happened! You're off the case, of course, and I don't blame you. I'm sending you a check by special messenger that I hope will take care of everything."

"Wait a minute, Evelyn," said Shayne, the wind completely out of his sails. He had been planning to give her hell and quit, but again she had

turned the tables right around.

"It's all *right*, Mike," she insisted. "I heard about what happened to you over the air. I'm so sorry."

"It's okay," he said, not believing his own ears. "But Evelyn, the police are after all three of you. I just came from Headquarters."

"I know," she replied. "We're still way ahead of them." There was a lilt in her tone that suggested the Emerald Queen was actually enjoying herself. As she rang off, he looked at his friends and said, "What a woman!"

"She must be something, all right—but *what?*" Lucy sounded peeved as she headed for her desk in the outer office.

"Okay, Mike," said Rourke, swinging a leg over the desk corner. "Suppose you give me a blow by blow. Maybe I can fill in a few of the chinks."

When he had finished, the reporter looked at him in puzzlement, said, "What do you think?"

"To hell with what *I* think," Shayne replied. "You know everything I know—so what do *you* think?"

"I think I'd like to have seen that list of names on the charred file folders," Tim replied. "What did you do with them?"

"I burned them myself," said the detective.

"Admirable," said the newsman. "Wholly admirable! But what a bloody waste!"

"What do you think about Richie Ireland?" Shayne asked, changing the subject.

"Like you, I'm on the fence, I guess," said Rourke. "By logic, he's got to be your man—after all, Mario's involvement is almost certainly secondary, as a friend, not a principal. So the mysterious Ramon de Jonggh was a blackmailer. That's the big news in what you've told me."

"Sit on that until you get word from me, Tim."

"If I can, baby. You say you told the police?"

"I did not. Will Gentry runs an efficient department, but no organization as big as the Miami Police Force is entirely leakproof."

"Okay then—as long as the *Herald* doesn't beat us to the street with it—like they did with your spending last night in the pokey for stealing your own car."

The ringing of the phone on Shayne's desk made both men jump. It was Lucy. "A Dr. Allerdice wants to talk to you."

"Put him on."

"Mr. Shayne—Mike—this is Will Allerdice. When I heard about your misfortune of last night, it occurred to me that you might be a free agent. My

offer still stands. I still want protection."

"Even after what happened to me yesterday?" said the detective.

"Those things happen to everyone now and then," the psychiatrist replied. "As I understand it, your behavior was absolutely correct. It's the behavior of others that seems irrational."

Shayne made up his mind. "Doctor Allerdice, I'll be glad to have you as a client. I'll report to your house at five o'clock. Will that be all right? It's well before dark."

"That will be fine," the doctor assured him. Then, as if he could read Shayne's mind, "Go home and get some rest. I'm sure you could use some, and my job will be mostly night work. I feel reasonably safe daytimes."

The price was set and Shayne hung up. "I seem to be back on this damned case again," he told the reporter.

* * *

Again a police car sat unobtrusively outside the psychiatrist's glass-brick and marble mansion, but this time a servant opened the door in answer to the detective's ring—an Oriental housebody in white Yat Sen jacket.

"Mr. Shayne? Would you care to park your car in the garage?

Feeling refreshed after four hours of sleep, a shower, shave and change of clothing, the detective assented gladly. He had no desire to leave it outside where it might be stolen again.

X

AFTER AN EXCELLENT curry, cooked and served by Manoel, the houseboy, the detective and Dr. Allerdice stretched out in the leathery, comfortable living room, sipping highballs slowly and watching the large built-in television screen on the wall.

"I used to be contemptuous of television," said the psychiatrist. "Then I found myself in steady demand for talk shows and occasional specials, and I became, I fear, another prisoner of the mass-entertainment tube."

"We all are to some extent," said Shayne.

He looked perfectly at ease but his senses were very much on the alert. Not that he anticipated danger—that was the doctor's department—but awareness that the psychiatrist was uptight made the detective's tendrils quiver. If, as he stated, young Richie Ireland had murdered Loretta Thomas, there seemed no reason for him to anticipate further molestation.

But there was nothing

phoney about the doctor's edginess. Once, when the house creaked in response to the vibration caused by a heavy truck on the highway a quarter mile away, Allerdice visibly trembled. Yet he had asked the police to withdraw their protective watch shortly after the detective's arrival.

"It's bad for me," Allerdice explained. "My list of patients includes some very influential persons, and absolute secrecy is essential."

"Why so?" Shayne inquired.

"You remember what happened to Tom Eagleton when it was discovered that he had once taken psychiatric treatments. He had to withdraw as the Democratic Vice-Presidential candidate in 'seventy-two—even though he had not been under treatment for several years and had a fine senatorial record."

"I remember," said the detective.

"The possibility of their being observed by the police worries them—and it is my job to cure their anxieties, not to increase them. Since some of them visit me after hours here at home . . ." He let it hang.

Manoel had departed after cleaning up the dinner dishes, and the doctor and detective were alone in the compact little mansion that served Allerdice

as both office and home. The program they were watching came to an end and a series of announcements and commercials began.

Shayne rose, said, "I think I'll take a look around outside."

Dr. Allerdice held up a restraining hand. "Please pardon a bit of blatant egoism on my part, Mike, but I think they're about to announce my Saturday program. I'd like to have you see it."

Moments later, the psychiatrist's image appeared on the large wall screen. The show was one which dealt with the unlikely hobbies of some of Miami's more prominent citizens. Apparently, Dr. Allerdice's was collecting butterflies. He spoke learnedly and, when he turned to a blackboard behind him, diagrammed lepidoptera deftly, using both hands simultaneously to draw the outlines of their wings and bodies.

The announcement concluded after his image was replaced by that of a plump lady judge who indulged in marathon swims on her days off.

"A neat trick," said Shayne, honestly admiring the psychiatrist's manual dexterity. "Where'd you pick it up?"

"I didn't, really," was the modest demurrer. "We had an instructor in school who drew

with both hands. I was imitating him at the blackboard one day when he had to leave the room—you know how kids are—and I simply found I could do it. Since then, it's been both amusing and helpful at times."

"It should be." Shayne put down his drink, rose and went to the bathroom. It was a relief to get away from the doctor's tensions. If relaxation was the name of the game, he thought, perhaps Dr. Allerdice should go to a shrink for treatments.

When he got back to the living room the doctor was on the telephone.

"Very well," he said into the mouthpiece, acknowledging the detective's return with a nod. "In fifteen minutes, madame. I'm sure we can put some of your anxieties to rest."

Hanging up, he said to Shayne, "Would you believe that one of the most important ladies in the state—in the country, for that matter—is convinced that her husband of thirty-three years is trying to drive her insane by putting snakes in her bed?"

"No snakes?" Shayne asked.

"No snakes that anyone else can see."

"I'd like to know where she buys her booze," said the detective.

The psychiatrist smiled wryly, said, "She doesn't drink. In

fact, she's high up in the Anti-Saloon League."

A pause, then, "Now, Mike, when she comes, I want you to stand inside the dining room door. Not that I'm expecting any trouble, but all the same . . . You can see clearly through the hinged crack."

"I understand," said Shayne. "You don't want her to see me."

"That's it." Dr. Allerdice nodded his approval.

Shayne said, "Doctor, if you don't mind, I'll take that look around now—before she gets here."

"Good idea." Allerdice nodded, then added, "Not that I'm expecting trouble with you here."

"Who knows I'm here?" the detective asked.

"A point," the psychiatrist agreed. "but use the side door off the library in case she's early. Then she won't see you and be scared off."

"She sounds like a prize dingaling." Shayne followed orders wondering why, if his client expected no trouble, he had gone to the expense of hiring a bodyguard at all. But, following instructions, he made a wide berth of the lighted areas both in and outside the front entrance.

As he moved silently along the walk that led toward the driveway, he felt a familiar

prickling at the base of his skull, a tightening of his diaphragm muscles. The muted sounds of the city still sounded, but the immediate area seemed entirely too quiet, as if it were holding its breath.

Almost by reflex action, Shayne's right hand went to the hilt of his .45 in its shoulder rig as he reached the corner of the modern mansion. There he paused and waited, listening while his eyes completed their adjustment to the near-darkness.

He heard soft footfalls, then the sound of the front door closing quietly and thought, *The dingaling certainly got here in a hurry.* Peering around the corner, he saw the shadowed contours of a dark sedan parked on the far side of the driveway turnaround, close to where the police car had parked.

He moved away from the house a little to get a better look at it in the glow of the lamps on either side of the front door, recognized the gleaming grillework of a Mercedes sedan like the one Lucy had rented for him the previous evening. Hardly coincidental, he decided, considering the number of black Mercedes sedans in the Greater Miami area.

Still . . .

He worked his way around

the parking area in front of the doctor's house, keeping in the shadows of the palms as much as possible. As he got closer, he saw that no one appeared to be in it. Then he saw something else—the car-rental initials on the front license plate.

While he had not had opportunity to memorize the numbers of the Mercedes he had driven so briefly, the fact that it *was* a Mercedes of the same model and paint job and bore rental insignia seemed to him to be carrying coincidence a trifle too far.

Carefully, he checked it out. It was empty. The base of his skull prickled harder than ever as he hurried back to the side door, drawing his gun as he did so. As he stepped inside, a familiar voice said, "Freeze right where you are."

It was the voice of Mario, the bartender who had slipped him the mickey and, he suspected, been the active agent in most of the indignities he had suffered since becoming involved in the case. The plump young man was standing no more than five feet away and a ray of light from his rear illuminated the revolver in his right hand.

Forty-eight hours of frustration and humiliation suddenly detonated, and the redhead moved with pantherine swiftness. He let himself carom off

the corridor wall to crash into his tormentor from the right side—so that he would have to divert the gun and employ an extra fraction of a second before he could bring it to bear on Shayne and fire.

As he did so, he brought a roundhouse left hook into the young man's beer belly, with all the force of his twisting, charging body behind it, giving his fist a vicious torque as it sank into soft flesh.

Mario uttered a half-strangled squawk as the air left his lungs and he doubled over, dropping his gun to the carpet, in time for his drooping chin to make violent contact with the redhead's upthrusting knee. Mario fell forward on his face, dead to the world, while the detective picked up the revolver he had dropped and thrust it inside the waistband of his slacks.

Proceeding via the dining room, Shayne moved swiftly and softly until he reached the post Dr. Allerdice had asked him to take behind the dining room door. Through its crack, he could see most of the living room clearly.

The Irelands, mother and son, faced the psychiatrist in what was obviously a confrontation. Allerdice, on his feet, stood his ground bravely despite the fact that young Richie

was covering him with a handgun. The psychiatrist was speaking, evenly and with only the slightest of nervous tremolos in his voice.

As the detective picked up the conversation, he said, "You accuse me of murdering both Loretta and my friend Ramon?"

"That's right."

"Then would you mind telling me why?"

"You were blackmailing me," said Richie. "You were bleeding us white."

"You have no proof of that," the psychiatrist protested. "You have no proof because it's a lie. You killed them both. You were jealous of Loretta and me and when de Jonggh threatened to blackmail you for the crime, you killed *him* before he could get protection from Shayne. You're psychotic anyway. I can prove it."

"You won't get the chance," said Richie Ireland. "Mom, get into the other room. I don't want you to see this. Let's get it over with."

"For the love of God, don't kill him!" Evelyn yelled as her son lifted his gun. Shayne stepped out from the dining room to deal with him.

Allerdice made a lunge at the Emerald Queen and knocked her off-balance. Richie fired but missed the doctor, and Shayne was on him like a tiger, grab-

bing his left wrist and slamming it down hard across his own upthrusting thigh.

Richie screamed in agony and Shayne silenced him with an edge-of-the-hand chop to the left side of his neck that felled him like a log. He retrieved his own pistol, kicked the Remington against the wall, then gave his attention to Evelyn Ireland.

He needn't have. Her nervous energy had easily overcome the psychiatrist, who lay on his back at her feet with a bruise on his left temple where she had pistol-whipped him.

"Thanks, Mike," she said. "I'm okay."

A sound, a flicker of motion almost behind him, caused the detective to whirl in time to cover Mario, who came staggering into the room, aroused by the sounds of the shots. Shayne covered him and Mario stopped and raised his hands.

"Now," the detective said, "let's get everything straight."

* * *

"I don't see how you ever figured it out," Lucy Hamilton told him admiringly. She and he were seated alone and quiet in the living room of her trim little apartment. Tim Rourke had left them minutes before to file a story on the solution of the murders for the *News's* early edition.

"Bits and pieces," Mike Shayne told her. "You know most of them. What really tied it together was seeing on the tube that Dr. Allerdice is ambidextrous. Until then, the left-handed angle had me up the wall. Without it, nothing quite fitted."

"Will Dr. Allerdice be convicted?" she said.

"Of blackmail, probably not. His victims were too powerful and he operated through Ramon—which was where Ramon got his information and why he wasn't richer. Of murder, almost certainly, now the police are sure it was he. Once they know the guilty party, the evidence piles up. Ballistics will prove out, for one thing. We found a small arsenal in the good doctor's house. One of them has to match."

"I still don't see why he operated on his own against Richie

"Because he couldn't operate through Ramon and because he was greedy," Shayne told her. "Then Richie came up with the angle of making Loretta fall in love with him and getting his own money back with interest.

She was tired of being an old man's darling and went wild for the kid. Unfortunately, Allerdice found out—probably she told him—and after that she was as good as dead. His ego couldn't stand it."

"Why did he kill Ramon?"

"Because he had to. Ramon had too much on him and he was going to spill it to me. The move to have Evelyn dismiss me was mere cover. Unfortunately for him, he told Allerdice he was fed up with the whole business and ready to talk. So he signed his own death warrant, too. It seems to have been difficult to think of Allerdice as a potential murderer."

"Maybe he'll get off on unsound mind grounds," said Lucy.

"It's possible—but I doubt it. He's a lot more greedy than crazy." He paused, glanced around, said to the girl, "Angel, my glass is empty."

"And it's going to stay that way for a while," she murmured as she reached for him across the sofa. "It's been a long, long time."

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LOOK BEFORE YOU SHOOT

Howie may have killed in haste, but he was shrewd enough to rig plenty of scot-free leisure to plan a getaway. Unfortunately, he plotted only to elude the police.

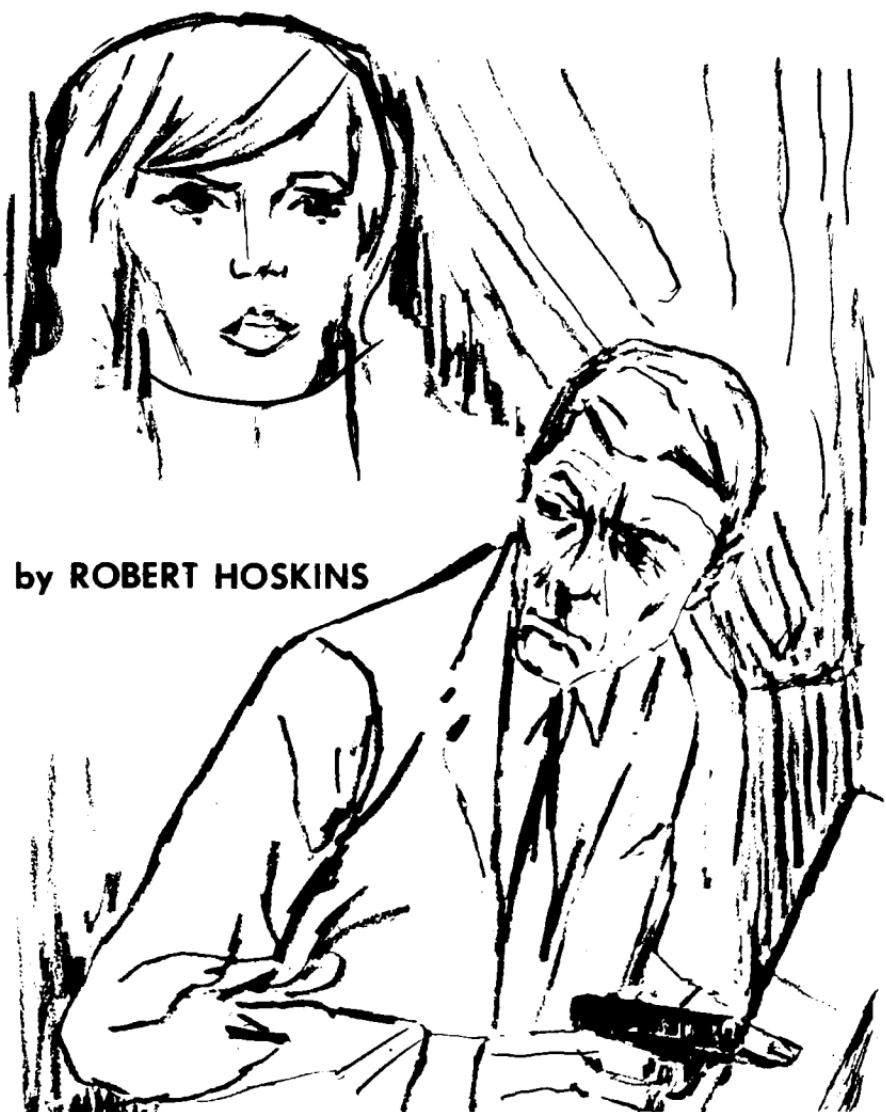


HE STOOD ON the crest of the ridge, looking down at the narrow valley that cut a gash into the western range of the mountains. A thousand yards out, the valley widened into the flats, which in turn ran on for nearly ten miles before they dropped into the river valley. October chill crept under the collar and cuffs of his mackinaw, chafing his neck and wrists. The leaden skies were heavy with the first snow of the year—a few of the first flakes were already drifting down.

He shivered, a tall man, thankful there was no wind. He was heavily bearded, with thick black hair that drooped over his forehead, a wild cap for his an-

gular face. He let the rifle slip from the cradle of his arm and rested it against a tree while he stripped off his mittens, rubbing the penetrating chill from his hands. He blew on them, his breath faintly visible in the quickening dusk.

The watcher had been waiting at this spot for nearly an hour. He was hungry and tired, but he waited patiently. Sunrise this morning had found him six miles deeper into the mountains. He had been working his way out for the past two weeks, moving slowly and with great caution, avoiding contact with the early bow-and-arrow hunters and the occasional trapper checking his line



by ROBERT HOSKINS

against the approaching winter.

Tomorrow the regular deer season would open, if he had kept the right track of the days.

His vigil on the ridge was rewarded by the sudden flash of headlights out on the flat. A few minutes later came the

deep growl of a Jeep in four-wheel drive, pushing over a rutted woods road that would have been impassable to an ordinary car, hung too low for rut clearance.

The lights kept bobbing in and out of sight among the scrub brush that covered the floor of the valley, and which was already in darkness. Then the Jeep appeared again at a point below him, staying in sight until it pulled into a clearing. The motor cut off, but the lights stayed on for a few minutes as its passengers got out. There was the clear sound of voices, a flashlight's beam bobbing, then suddenly cut off. A moment later an orange glow came from the open door of the cabin.

He removed his mittens again to scratch idly at the underside of his chin, suddenly aware of the loneliness of the past months . . .

ILONA WAS BORED with the Adirondacks, with the summer creeps who came up from the cities to escape the heat and spent their days complaining to each other about the lack of anything to *do*. There was every imaginable summer sport available save for surfing and deep sea fishing, but the customers at Pine Mountain Lodge were not inclined toward ac-

tivities that required their personal involvement.

They wanted to be entertained, distracted, loved for their gross habits behind the locked doors of their rooms. They were comfortable only when crowding each other along the single narrow street of the village's business section, inhaling the perfume of the motor cars.

"What do you *want* from me?" he demanded that morning, midway into August. "You wanted a new car, you *got* it—you wanted a shopping trip to New York, you *got* it. The Lodge makes good money, Ilona, and you get your share. So for Christ's sake, tell me what it is with you!"

"I want out," she said, disgusted. "As far out of this place as I can get. You keep entertaining your rich bitches from New York, Howie, paw them all you want. Just let me out of here!"

"You want a divorce?" It was not the first time that he had asked the question. She smiled. "Maybe. If no better offer comes along . . ."

She walked out on him then. Ilona was usually the one to walk out on the arguments, ending them in a way that he had not yet figured how to overcome. Howie's stomach was churning when he went to the

office, to attack the problem of the three big-name golfers trying to bow out of the big tournament scheduled for weekend after next—too late for him to get solid drawing-card replacements. But his anger was only partly toward them.

Noon came, and he could stand it no longer—he had to get away for a while. He came out of his office, stopping only long enough to tell the switchboard he did not know when he would be back, went down to get his car in the space that was marked with his name—*Howard Stellman, Manager.*

The Porsche that was his major joy growled smoothly along the road into the village, passing the steady stream of mountain-bound traffic, most of it tourists; none of them able to make better than thirty-five miles an hour. Stellman was aware of stares of envy as his car shot by in the opposite direction at seventy.

At first he had intended to drive straight through the village, but at the last moment he remembered some papers he was supposed to pick up at the motel annex of the Lodge, in the heart of town. He moved his car under the carport by the small office, and started in—then stopped, seeing the familiar rear-end of a red car. To satisfy his curiosity he walked



back into the court. Ilona hadn't even been careful in parking.

For a moment Stellman's heart seemed to swell in his breast, then stop. A haze of anger colored his vision. He turned on his heel and went back to the office, coming out again with the master key and leaving behind him a college-boy desk clerk certain that his

job was over for that summer.

Stellman went quickly to the unit that Ilona had appropriated, listening at the door until he heard her soft laughter from within. He forced himself to wait a moment longer, trying to control his anger, not giving in to the first urge to slam immediately through the door. Instead, he used the key, which worked the dead-bolt as well.

The gun was an accident. It belonged to the man in the room, a florid salesman type who looked vaguely familiar—probably one of the bar loungers who hopped from cocktail lounge to cocktail lounge with short breaks in between as they peddled their wares. Stellman thought he had seen him around the Lodge once—or twice—which was probably where he had met Ilona.

The gun fell from his jacket pocket when Stellman slugged him, knocking him across the bed. Then he bent quickly to pick it up, watching himself as though he were standing outside his own body. The man came off the bed but before he could reach Stellman the gun fired twice, knocking him down again.

Ilona must have screamed. Afterward he was sure he remembered a scream. It might have been his own voice, for his throat was sore for the rest of

that day. It made little difference. He shot her twice, once in the mouth and once in the left eye. The .32 didn't make much noise and he didn't panic. There was no one nearby to hear.

He closed the door to the unit and went to his car, driving a carefully measured pace back to the Lodge, staying with the stream of traffic. It was not until he was alone in his own office that Stellman let himself realize what he had done.

It started as a tremor in his fingers. Before the spasm had passed him, he collapsed on the couch, burying his face in his hands, the sobs wracking his body. He choked on the gall in his throat, beating his head back against the arm of the couch until the pain was sharp, the thin layer of flesh over the back of his skull bruised. Then at last he managed to pick himself up, to drag himself into the small adjoining bathroom.

Howie Stellman looked at himself in the mirror of his office washroom. His eyes were rimmed with red, his face haggard. He turned the cold water on full blast and plunged his hands into it, the icy chill shocking his system. He splashed the water over his face, letting it trickle from his fingers and down his neck.

He stared deep into his own eyes then—Howie Stellman, 29,

successful young businessman, man on the rise.

Howie Stellman, murderer.

He shuddered and turned away, wiping his hands. He was under control now, and knew that he would remain in control. He went back into the office, opened the safe and withdrew the two thousand in emergency cash, then sat down to plan.

Most of the weekend receipts had been deposited in the bank that morning—did he dare try to withdraw them again? How much time did he have before Ilona and the man were discovered? Had he, for Christ's sake, even remembered to close the door to the unit when he came out?

The bank was too dangerous—he could tap the till at the desk. He should have picked up the cash at the annex as well. But he couldn't go back there, obviously.

No one noticed as he slipped out of the office to go up to the apartment. There, the presence of Ilona hit him the moment he walked into the room. It was there in the way things were tossed about haphazardly, in a breakfast coffee cup still on the living room sofa. Her smell lay thick in the air—a musky, oversweet scent that made him queasy as soon as he took a deep breath.

He hurried into his own bedroom, where he gathered the things he would need carefully, stowing them in a big softsided flight bag. Finished, he closed his eyes as he checked things off his mental list, then took the bag down the backstairs to stow in the car.

Then he went back in to the desk, telling the clerk that he needed the money in the register to cash a large traveler's check. There was almost four hundred, and he took all of it except for three fives and a slim stack of ones.

The activity of the Lodge was normal for a Monday—a few kids running in from swimming at the beach, a few older folk sitting around the lobby reading newspapers, a young woman waiting impatiently by her luggage to be picked up by a missing husband. She was checking her watch as Stellman moved into the bar, to take another hundred from the register there. The barman eyed him curiously, but said nothing as Stellman went back to the office.

Once there, he stowed the money in one pocket, and started for the backstairs again—then stopped, and hurried back to the apartment. This time, he went into Ilona's bedroom, found her jewel box on the dresser. He pawed

through the junk, selecting the good pieces and wrapping them in a silk handkerchief—the stuff had cost him almost fifty thousand. It would be convertible to cash in the right places.

He stuffed the handkerchief into his shirt pocket and went down to the car, forcing himself to walk slowly. He drove out of the parking lot at a sedate pace, heading the car toward the village, resisting the urge to shove his foot down to the floor.

Halfway to the village, a state trooper passed him with siren screaming. Stellman edged over onto the shoulder. The officer wasn't looking for him—*not yet*—which was a relief. Maybe it was something else—maybe they hadn't discovered the bodies yet.

But when he came into the village he saw two police cars pulled up outside the annex, and a large crowd of gawkers gathered. Again he resisted the impulse to floor the accelerator, forcing himself to remain calm as the car approached the motel—and then the desk clerk was there on the sidewalk, pointing in his direction. The nearest trooper started toward him, waving a hand to stop.

The street ahead was blocked by a jam of curious traffic and it was forty miles out before it connected with another major

highway that skirted the fringes of the mountains. Even if he got through the village, they could stop him almost anywhere.

He stared at the approaching trooper for perhaps three seconds—and then the car was whipping around in a tight turn, passing into a narrow alley and bumping out again behind the hardware store. A rough unpaved street cut behind the buildings, coming out back at the lakefront.

The little car proved its power as he threw it first into the alley, then back to the main street. The trooper's cars would hardly squeeze through the alley. With luck, it would take them a couple of minutes to figure out which way he had gone.

He went roaring back toward the Lodge with the little car's powerful motor full out, ignoring the traffic clogging the road.

Stellman was driving in the wrong lane and sounding his horn furiously to force drivers headed in his direction to move off onto the shoulder. Ahead of him, the road lay clear through the Adirondacks. Where again he could be stopped almost anywhere. Five miles from the village was the State Police substation.

Fighting panic, Stellman

twisted the wheel sharply, cutting left into a dirt road that cut deep into the pines. He knew his way blindfold on all of these narrow, twisting roads. Most of them doubled back on themselves, returning to the highway.

This particular one took a five-mile loop around the shore of a small private lake. Its only offshoots were private roads to isolated camps along the lake shore. His wheels churned dirt from the surface for two miles and then he swung into a driveway, running the car behind a clump of blackberry bushes that bordered a small meadow.

The gun was in his hand, although there was only one bullet left in the chamber, but a target pistol lay in the outside pocket of the flight bag. As he got out of the car, Stellman hoisted the bag to the hood for a moment, unzipping the pocket to keep the gun handy.

Suddenly the adrenalin that had flooded his system to keep him going ran out. He slumped against the little car, exhausted, wiping sweat from his forehead. He permitted himself three deep breaths, then pushed away from the Porsche, flight bag in his left hand, gun in his right, making his way to a path that led down to the lake.

A moment later, the steel-gray water lay in sight and, to his left, the weathered hulk of a private lodge. The path cut around a big boulder in its way, left there by the last glacier, and there was a dock at its bottom. Boats were tied to either side of it.

At the end of the dock, a seaplane was bobbing at its moorings with a man working over the engine housing. He straightened as Howie Stellman came out onto the dock, closed the engine cover, turning as he wiped his hands on a rag. His eyes met Stellman's, then flicked down to the gun in his hand.

"Hi, Howie. Going hunting?"

"Not quite, Sam. I need a lift. Is Gussie gassed up?"

Sam looked at the aircraft. He was a burly man, perhaps ten years older than Stellman. He shrugged. "I've got enough for maybe fifty minutes cruising."

"That will be enough. Let's go."

Sam Craig shrugged again, then turned to untie the mooring of the plane. He opened the door and stood aside as Howie Stellman placed the bag carefully behind the seats. The plane bobbed in the water while Stellman climbed in after Sam Craig and twisted, buckling his belt. The motion settled,

however, as Craig switched on the ignition and started the engine.

A moment later they were moving out onto the surface of the lake, circling around until they were facing into the wind. Then Craig fed power to the engine, and they took off quickly, angling over the pine forests and rising above the level of the nearest mountain slope.

"Which way?" Craig asked then, looking to Stellman.

"West." Howie Stellman pointed.

For the next twenty minutes they moved across the pine mountains, passing over small valleys and hundreds of tiny lakes, occasionally over a fair-sized river. Then they were coming out of the mountains, moving over lowland. Ahead was a ribbon of dark gray highway.

Stellman tapped Craig's shoulder, pointing along the road. They followed it for a few more minutes, passing over one good-sized village and another smaller one, and then they were cutting down toward a small lake Stellman had chosen. A dirt road led to it, and there was barely room for the small plane to drop onto its surface. Craig taxied over to the shore.

The lake was deserted, showing no signs of habitation or

use except for a half-buried old scow at the shore. There was a rutted overgrown road pushing under the trees, and Craig taxied the plane there. Stellman unbuckled his belt and jumped onto the spongy ground, then reached in for his bag, tossing it behind him. He brought out the gun again, not really pointing it at Craig, but holding it ready.

"Where's the gas tank on this thing?" Stellman asked.

Craig pointed and, at Stellman's urging, reached over to open the drain cock. The remaining fuel drained out to form a rainbow slick on the surface of the water. Stellman stood watching until there was no more to come. Only then did he back toward his bag on the shore.

"Sorry to trouble you like this, Sam," he said. "It's only about four miles in the village by the woods road, maybe a mile to the state highway—but I'd advise you to wait a while, maybe an hour, before you start out."

"I'm in no hurry, Howie. I've got no place to go."

"That's good—because I do. Tell the cops I'll see them in Brazil, or maybe Costa Rica."

He picked up the bag then, and started up the trail. The lake vanished from sight within thirty paces, and then he was

coming out of the rutted old trail onto a sand-surfaced road. He walked along it for perhaps a quarter of a mile, until it forked. The left fork, leading to the village, was blacktopped. There he stopped to look back the way he had come. No one was following him.

He took the bag into the bushes alongside the road, zipped it open, took out a pair of heavy engineer's boots and stout khaki trousers. He stripped off his lightweight slacks and shirt, kicked off his loafers and pulled off his thin socks, replacing them with heavy cotton socks from the bag. Then he dressed in the khaki pants and a long-sleeved shirt, pulling on the boots and lacing them tightly.

The discarded clothes went into the bag, while he brought out one final item, stout canvas straps that he used to rig the flight bag for carrying on his back. It was awkward, but it shouldn't have to serve him too long. He hoisted, checked it for balance, stepped back into the fork of the road, looking in all three directions.

Then he took the other sand road, heading back into the mountains . . .

THE DOOR OF the cabin remained open while the men unloaded the jeep. There were two of

them, although Howie couldn't make them out as individuals. But one of their voices was familiar to him.

Finally the Jeep's headlights were cut off. On the ridge Howie blinked as darkness descended across the valley again. As his eyes adjusted to the softer glow from the cabin, the door closed, cutting that off as well.

He waited a few more minutes, patiently, ignoring his stomach's complaints. Then he began to work his way back down the ridge. He moved with caution, aware that he was weak from hunger, taking a good twenty minutes before he came up to the Jeep and stopped.

The cabin was small, weatherbeaten and unpainted. Stellman knew that it had one medium-sized room downstairs and a low-ceilinged sleeping loft above. Through a window on the left dim light blowed. There was another cabin in the clearing, only fifty feet away, but it was dark, still empty of hunters.

He removed his mittens again, stuffed them in a pocket. He took a deep breath, cradling the gun in his left arm, his finger resting alongside the trigger guard as he reached out to the doorknob. Then he was lifting it and yanking the door open. He was inside before the

men at the table had a chance to turn around.

There were just the two. One was white-haired and wore glasses, his skin heavy with the folds of age. The other was no more than a boy. He must have been sixteen, for he wore a license pack on the back of his Dayglo orange jacket, but he looked younger.

The intruder studied them carefully, then looked at the man. "Hello, Jack."

"Howie! I kinda thought we might run into you when I heard about the camps that had been burglarized the past couple of months. How you makin' it?"

"Not so good, Jack. It's been colder than I expected."

A fire had been built in the ancient wood range that nearly filled the back of the room. Now its heat was beginning to fill the cabin, which was lighted by a single gas lamp on the table. A stack of canned goods and food packages stood on the oilcloth near the lamp. Stellman gestured toward the food.

"Can you spare some of that, Jack."

"Sure, there's plenty. Bacon and eggs do you?"

"That sounds just fine."

The old man nodded, and produced a large fire-blackened frying pan. He brought bacon

from the table and laid a few strips in the pan, then thought better of it and tripled the quantity. He used a lifter to take the small center out of one of the stove lids and set the pan over the open flame. When the bacon was done he poured off half of the grease, then broke in half a dozen eggs to scramble.

Stellman watched him for a moment, then went over to the table, pulling out a chair. He set the rifle down carefully, resting the barrel against the edge of the table. The boy sat across from him.

"Drink, Howie?" asked Jack Breck. "Good bourbon there."

"Thanks—after the food."

The old man nodded, reached over to lift away a teakettle that had already been on the fire. "Instant coffee, I'm afraid—these young fellas today don't know what real coffee should taste like."

As soon as the food was before him Stellman ate rapidly, ravenously. The major share of the eggs and bacon disappeared, along with two cups of the coffee, before he leaned back with a third, patting his distended stomach.

"That was real good, Jack."

"Yeah, I ain't forgot how to camp-cook. I guess you been kinda hungry?"

"I made out—although it's

been rough the past few weeks with the summer crowd gone and the hunters not in yet. Of course, I managed to pick up the gun here."

"How long has it been—three months?"

"Seventy-three days," Stellman said flatly. "Ten weeks and three days."

"The State Cops just about ran themselves ragged, chasing you—they swallowed that phony trail you planted, even though they couldn't find who gave you the ride south. For a while, people were spotting you all over—just last week there was a story you were down in Florida. None of them figured you'd head straight back into the mountains."

Howie Stellman shrugged. "That's what I wanted them to think—so that's why I did it this way."

"Yeah, I remember that about you, Howie—stubborn, even as a kid. I remember the time you and your Dad tore the bottom out of your canoe coming down from Big Moose with that ten pointer. Anybody else would have said the hell with the deer, but your Dad told me he practically had to knock you in the head with the paddle to get you to shore."

"That was a long time ago." Stellman smiled, wistful. "And that was the first buck I ever

took bigger than a spikehorn. I really wanted that rack."

He glanced at the boy, recognizing the relationship between the two even though more than half a century separated them. "One of your grandsons?"

"Yeah—he's Beth's boy. You remember Beth, don't you, Howie? She's had it kinda rough the last few years, been in and out of the state hospital half a dozen times."

Stellman felt suddenly uncomfortable, embarrassed at the admission of weakness in Breck's bloodline. He didn't like the thought of mental instability, felt it strike too close to home. He couldn't let himself think about what he had done to Ilona and the man.

"Jeff's been with us off and on—his Dad travels for one of the big computer companies," Breck said, "Where you figurin' on headin' now?"

"South, maybe—California, Mexico. Some place far away and warm. I don't ever want to be cold again."

"Florida's nice. I was down there last winter to visit my brother. He keeps tellin' me I should come down for good. Maybe I will, another year or so. Depends on how things go."

"I hope you make it."

"Oh, I'll make it, one way or another. Just like you. I suppose you want the Jeep?"

"It's the easiest way out," the wanted man said.

"Well, I've packed out of here times when you couldn't bring a car within five miles. Hell, up until the Second War, you came in here on horseback or by river. I don't suppose you remember that, though."

"I'm not that old, Jack."

Stellman looked around the room. It was comfortable, familiar. He had spent more than one autumn weekend with Jack Breck and a few of his father's old cronies in this cabin. But he hadn't come up in the five years since his father's death. Maybe it had been a mistake—but that was when Ilona started forcing him to make a success of himself.

He yawned, the heat making him sleepy, then shook his head to clear it. "Where are the keys, Jack?"

"In the Jeep—like always."

"I'll drop it in Utica or Syracuse, mail the keys back to you with the location."

Stellman picked up the rifle that had never been more than inches away from his hand, although he had no reason not to trust Jack and the boy. But his weeks in the mountains had made him cunning and very cautious. He shrugged into the mackinaw he had dropped over the back of the chair, then backed toward the door, the

stock of the rifle loose in his fingers.

"I'm sorry our last meeting had to be like this, Jack—but I don't think we'll be seeing each other again. So thanks for the hospitality."

The old man nodded. "Any time."

He watched as Stellman slipped through the door, pulling it tight—then the *snap* of the padlock as it was closed on the hasp.

Stellman ran for the Jeep, pausing only to brush away the light snow that was already accumulating on the windshield. The key was where Breck had said it was, and he turned it, pressing the pedal to the floor once. The motor groaned in protest, turning over reluctantly but not catching. He tried it again—and this time it caught. His heart moved back down from his throat.

Then he heard the crash of breaking glass as the old man threw a chair through the window of the cabin. He turned in time to see a form following the chair—and then the boy was on his feet, pumping the action of the repeating shotgun as he emptied the slugs into the Jeep.

The bright flashes chopped holes through the snow-filled air, joined now by the flatter crack of a handgun. The slugs tore through the thin side doors

of the Jeep, smashing out the side window and turning the windshield into a maze of cracked lines.

Some of the bullets tore into Stellman even as he was throwing the Jeep into gear, one knocking his knee away from the clutch. The motor stalled and he fell toward the terrible storm of lead. The weight of his body forced the door open, and he fell through, to land on his face in the new snow. He groaned, and moved, fingers digging at the snow as the old man came around the Jeep.

Breck nudged Stellman's shoulder with his foot, said, "The fella you killed, Howie—you didn't remember him."

Stellman shook his head, trying to clear his vision. His voice sounded in a faint whisper. "No..."

"He didn't know Ilona, either—she picked him up in one of the bars. Maybe he shouldn't have gone after a bar tramp like her, but there was some figured he had a right, what with his wife in the mental ward for the past two years. Ilona *did* go after him—he managed to tell the cops that much before he died."

Jack Breck sighed. "Of course, there are some who think that a man who fools around with another woman deserves whatever he gets—but

when Beth heard, she really went off the deep end, Howie. It was easy for her to run away from the hospital. She was one of the good patients, with the run of the grounds. She ran all the way to the river and threw herself in."

He looked at his grandson. "Yeah—the man you killed was Jeff's father. We were really hopin' the stories were wrong about you gettin' away clean, Howie."

Old Jack stared down at the dead man, satisfied that Howie Stellman had heard his last words. Then he bent over and went through Stellman's pockets, finding the handkerchief-wrapped jewelry in the jacket and the roll of bills in the shirt. He straightened with the slowness of his age, looking at the money in his hand. He tossed the roll to the boy.

"Maybe it's not much pay for a father and mother, Jeff, but I don't guess any amount of money would be enough."

Then he looked at the riddled Jeep, walking around it to slide behind the wheel. He tried the ignition, but there was an alarming odor of scorched wiring. He gave it up, and got out again.

"C'mon, boy—we better get to bed. We gotta pack out of here as soon as light breaks in the mornin'."

Jack's luck was uniformly bad, until his big break came.

CHANGE of LUCK

by CHARLES M. ANDREWS



JACK MUNROE PULLED his jacket collar a little higher to shade his face. As soon as the cop moved away from *Eddie's Bar*, he was going to see his girl Shirley and put the bite on her for a couple of Lincolns. Shirl didn't make too much in tips, but she had other ways of getting dough. And Jack couldn't afford to be too proud to take money from a babe, not with half the cops in New York on his tail.

As Jack waited, he mused over his bad breaks. Maybe he hadn't received good marks in school, but he could have. Hell, who wants to waste his time studying? And why did the

teacher have to make such a fuss about the crib sheets? Everybody cheats. Look at the mayor. Sure, some guys say he's honest, but he's a politician. Everybody knows no pol is honest. But things weren't all bad. If Jack had stayed in school, he never would have met Gimpy Rogers. And if he hadn't met Gimpy, he never would have been introduced to Shirley.

Shirl was okay. Maybe she was a peroxide blond, but she had a great smile, baby-blue eyes, and she knew how to make a guy happy. What's more, she knew how to keep her mouth shut. There sure

weren't many babes like Shirl around.

"*Beautiful!*" Jack intoned as the police officer moved down the street.

Shoving his hands in his pockets, Jack glanced furtively to left and right before crossing to *Eddie's*.

There was a good crowd for a week night. Maybe it was the war in Europe that brought out the customers. Jack wasn't sure, but he figured that was the reason. And what he wouldn't give to be in Europe! He wouldn't mind killing a few Huns. He was good with guns. One stupid cop who thought he could push him around found out. But that was more tough luck. These cops sure stick together. This town was just too hot.

As Jack entered the bar, Shirley spotted him. Soon they were talking in a back booth.

"Gee, Jack, I was so worried about you. I was sure the cops had nabbed you."

"Not me, Shirl. I'm too smart for that."

"It isn't always brains. It's luck, too."

"A guy makes his own luck. But sometimes he needs a little help."

"Gee, Jack, is there anything I can do to help you? Any little thing at all?"

"Well, I have to hole up

somewhere. I'll need a little scratch. I hate to ask you, but I can use anything you can spare. I'll pay it back in spades."

"I don't have much now, but I'll get some. One of the customers is making a play for me, and he has a roll you wouldn't believe. He wants to go to my place for a while. I don't like to make money that way, but since it's for you..."

The fog was hanging thick over the New York waterfront as Shirley Backys walked hand in hand with Bart Larsen. Bart was about Jack's height. His appearance was much like Jack's, except Bart wore spectacles and didn't have a mustache.

As the strollers passed the alley adjacent to Shirley's apartment house, they didn't notice the man move up behind them swinging a bottle. There was a thud. Then Bart Larsen sagged rag-doll fashion to the pavement.

"Let's get the wallet, pet. I hope he's as loaded as you say."

"Jack!"

"Let's hurry it up, Shirl. We can talk later."

After lifting the wallet, Jack quickly went through Bart's pockets.

"What's this envelope, Shirl? It says Cunard Lines on it."

"It's a steamship ticket to

England. This guy told me he's leaving May first."

"I've got news for you, dearie. This guy isn't going anywhere. He's stopped breathing."

"You shouldn't have hit him so hard. What are we going to do now?"

"Don't worry, pet. I'll think of something. I always do."

After removing everything from Bart's pockets, Jack struggled to hoist him to his feet.

"Come on, Shirl. Get on the other side of this bloke. I want to make it look as if we're supporting somebody drunk. Dead drunk."

In halting fashion, they reached the docks. Jack then bade Shirley stand watch while he took care of Bart's body.

In less than five minutes Jack returned, breathing heavily from his exertions. Under his arm he carried a compact bundle—Bart's clothes.

"Why did you have to take his clothes?"

"Hell, he'll be harder to identify this way. As of now, baby, I am Bart Larsen. By the way," he added, "how do you like the cheaters?"

"I hadn't noticed in the darkness. But you look pretty good in glasses. Like a professor, maybe."

"But do I look like Larsen?"

"Yeah, you really do. Except

for the mustache. Are you going to shave it?"

"No. When I flash Bart's passport, I'll just tell them I grew a nose tickler. There's no law against it."

"What do you mean?"

"I'm going to England."

Before boarding the Cunard four-stacker on May 1, Jack gave Shirley a last hug.

"Be sure to write—Bart. I'll sure miss you."

"I'll miss you, Shirl. Maybe if I like it in Old Blighty, I'll send for you. How would you like to be a duchess?"

"Just a Missus would be fine."

"Hey, don't laugh! Maybe some day you *will* be Mrs. Bart Larsen."

As Shirley began to swear affectionately at Jack's humor, the ship's whistle drowned out her words. The gangplank was raised and soon the great liner was under way. In just a week Jack would be safe in Europe. It was amazing how fast modern ships could steam across the Atlantic. But this was 1915, an age of technological miracles.

For the rest of the week, Shirley worked like an automaton at *Eddie's Bar*. She sorely missed Jack. Sure, she was upset by the killing of Bart Larsen, but it had been an accident. Jack hadn't meant to hit

him so hard. It was just another example of Jack's bad luck. Still, it did get Jack out of the country, and that was what really counted. Maybe his luck was finally taking a turn for the better. Nothing mattered quite so much as Jack's being all right. Not her happiness, not Bart Larsen's life.

On May 8, Shirley Backys was met by Eddie Ledfader at the door of *Eddie's Bar*. In his hand was a yellow envelope.

"Hey, Shirl, are you ever important. Here's a telegram for you."

"Thanks, Eddie. Give it here. It must be Jack."

As Shirley read, the tears started to run freely down her cheeks.

NEXT OF KIN OF BARTHOLOMEW LARSEN: THE CUNARD LINE REGRETS TO INFORM YOU THAT A GERMAN U-BOAT SANK THE CUNARD LINER LUSITANIA ON MAY, 7, 1915, OFF THE COAST OF IRELAND. BARTHOLOMEW LARSEN IS NOT LISTED AMONG THE SURVIVORS.

In the Next Issue—

MURDER MOST FAIR

A Thrilling New Mike Shayne Complete Short Novel

by BRETT HALLIDAY

Bodyguard duty has never been a Mike Shayne specialty, but as the body in question is that of screen star Katherine Leith, he proves unable to turn the job down. But what promises to be an easy assignment quickly turns into a nightmare as a person unknown plants a bomb in his Buick. Almost immediately, Kate is kidnapped from right under Shayne's nose, and then the lady who hired him is murdered. From then on, Shayne runs a tight-rope race with death to rescue the actress without ransom.

Summer of Vengeance

The fire was set, the girl was murdered, and it was Captain Diaz's job to find her killer.

by JERRY JACOBSON and SONNY ALVAREZ



THE DOME OF HEAT spread across the smoke-hazed sky of San Juan with an intensity one could nearly hold in one's palm. Captain Abe Diaz, Chief of Homicide Section of the San Juan Police Department, had been standing at his window several minutes, ruminating among other pressing matters on the tragic imbalances brought to Puerto Rico by industrial progress.

The new oil refinery at Ponce, the pharmaceuticals plant at Arecibo, the automobile factory, the copper refinery . . . he turned away from culprits who could not be legally caught and turned his mind back to one who could—the murderer of Casandra Gonzalez.

Excitement in San Juan

Miss Gonzalez had been only one of five young people to perish in the spectacular house fire that had swept with slow fury for the dead through the estate of Pedro Gonzalez three days before. Pedro Gonzalez, the dead girl's father, a wealthy plastics manufacturer, was in nearby Caguas, where his plant was located, when the fire occurred. He kept a second house there and he came home to San Juan infrequently, his subsequent statement revealed.

He and Mrs. Gonzalez were divorced. Mrs. Gonzalez had taken up residence in New York City, leaving the daughter pretty much on her own. But the absence of parental supervision had not changed her into an irresponsible, lawless rebel. The father drew her as a university student of high intelligence and solid reason, a dutiful daughter of which he had been extremely proud.

With the father's permission, Cassandra Gonzalez had given a party for some of her young friends at the house. The invited guests had been chiefly students, the sons and daughters of San Juan's rich and influential. In the early evening they had been served a buffet supper. At eight p.m., a

popular Puerto Rican Americanized rock-and-roll band set itself to playing the music of Chicago and Led Zeppelin in the massive dining room, whose table had been swept aside to give the dancers breadth of physical expression.

In all, the guests had numbered sixty-three.

The fine Gonzalez estate was constructed on three levels, fashioned chiefly of timber beams and wood when these materials were abundant on the undeveloped island. It was built on an undulating hill of grass and rocky ground. Only the garage level was even with solid ground.

The house's main floor, which housed the living room, dining room and kitchen facilities, stood roughly sixty feet above ground at the rear and then diminished to forty feet or so at the front, where the broad circular drive greeted guests. The third level, which was comprised of lounges, conference rooms, bedrooms and guest suites, was higher still, perhaps three times that of the main floor.

It had been a set fire. Diaz' arson investigators indicated no doubt of that. Gasoline had been strewn in a liberal wash

over the basement, up two staircases leading to the main floor, even down the principal hallway leading to the dining room. A canful had even been tossed into the huge oil furnace in the basement, thrown from a distance by the arsonist, for it exploded almost immediately. Instantly the basement was turned into an inferno and the fire sped swiftly upon its destructive course.

The young people upstairs fell into instantaneous panic. Many, who were visiting and eating plates of food on the third floor, found stairwells blocked by smoke and fire. Two young men used their heads and began making ropes out of bedsheets and blankets—sadly, not before three of the young guests had leapt screaming from verandas to their deaths.

Cassandra Gonzales had not been one of those found on the third floor when the fire broke out. She had been chatting with her young guests in the dining room area. This room was the worst hit by the smoke and flames in the early minutes after the shuddering explosion.

All but Miss Gonzalez and another girl had escaped either down rear hallways or through broken windows in the front of the house, where the drop to grassy areas adjacent to the concrete entry drive was not so

severe. Their actions seemed to indicate to Diaz that someone had kept his head and had given directions about the safest and quickest routes of escape.

The other dead girl, Rita Ramos, was found by firemen curled in a pitiable ball in a stairway leading up to the third floor. Asphyxiation was the cause of death. Anyone who had attempted to escape by that staircase would have met the same grisly fate.

The body of Casandra Gonzalez was found in a broken heap on rocky earth sixty feet below. The autopsy surgeon's report lay on Captain Diaz' desk. It indicated that the girl had died from a snapped cervical vertebra at the base of the neck and a total spinal break near the pelvis. Either injury would have been fatal. Her peach cocktail dress was badly torn, but there was no way of telling whether it had been torn in the frenzy of the fire, at the hands of some assailant unknown or as a result of her long fall.

Captain Diaz turned from his window and walked back to his desk, on which were neatly piled the assorted reports on the tragedy. They represented the early work done by two young detective sergeants Diaz had assigned to the case, David Lopez and Cesar Jiménez, both

graduates of the university and both too severe and serious for Diaz' liking. He liked a little humor in his men, a sense of the ridiculous at times.

It was Sergeant Lopez who had first confronted the body of the Gonzalez girl beneath the patio and there had discovered what might be the first small piece of physical evidence in her death. It came in the form of a small metal button whose chemical analysis was mildly interesting.

The tests revealed particles of tar, methane, benzine, hydrogen sulphide, coal and coke dust and powdery particles of pure carbon. Jokingly, Diaz had called the chemical lab back on the telephone after the analysis had been received to voice his disappointment that they could not tell him what its owner had eaten for breakfast.

That morning, photographs had been made of the button for Diaz' two detectives to distribute among the surviving guests. It was his hope one or another of them would be able to identify the button in some way. He knew full well that murder cases were sometimes broken on such slender clues as this.

In the afternoon, David Lopez returned to Diaz' office. He was a dark-haired handsome young man despite a nasty scar which

ran the length of his right cheek, from the far edge of his eye to the knoll of his chin. The gash was the result of a gang fight among two rival youth groups in one of San Juan's *favelas*—slum districts—of which there were many in the city.

To most *favelados*, fighting and death were a way of life and crime a natural graduation in their lives. Few young hoodlum *favelados* ever managed to get free of the poverty and deprivation of the slums but David Lopez had harbored dreams and ambitions grander and more honorable than most. He was developing into a good detective because he could use his early street knowledge to a decided advantage.

Cesar Jiménez, his partner on the Gonzalez death, was from the other side of the tracks, the son of a well-to-do grape grower in Cayey. Their separate backgrounds put them at odds occasionally, but Diaz judged the combination to be more complimentary than destructive.

Sergeant Lopez fell into a chair before the captain's desk, loosened his necktie and began flapping his shirtfront to fan his perspiring neck and chest.

"We had no luck with the photographs of the button," he said wearily. "Jiménez is check-

ing the notions stores to see if they sell anything of that type."

Captain Diaz nodded.

"But he won't have any luck."

Diaz asked why.

"Because the button is a very crude one, not the type one would expect to find on a street garment or suit or shirt. But you know Jiménez, sir, when something gets stuck in his head. Prying it out is like pulling loose a whale's tooth with a set of celluloid eyebrow tweezers.

Diaz enjoyed the almost sibling rivalry which had developed between his two young detectives. Diaz, a widower, lived alone in a comfortable not too elegant cabaña above the fine beach at *La Perla* in old San Juan. His own sons now lived in the United States, where they were raising their own families and pursuing careers in marine biology and business.

He was proud that both his sons had graduated from college, because he himself had not even finished high school. His youth had been spent in poverty and he had held jobs since the age of twelve.

Lopez and Jiménez made him feel at times as though he had received God's unexpected gift of a second set of sons. And as with his natural sons, Diaz

tried not to favor one young detective over the other, or to make any disparaging remarks at the expense of either of them, or to criticize one of them in the presence of the other. He would bring them along together, as equals, dispensing encouragement and compliments in equal amounts as they came due.

AS HE THOUGHT of these things he noted David Lopez' hungry eyes. They had been drawn to something in the reports spread on Captain Diaz' desk. Perhaps because of his less advantaged upbringing, Lopez felt at times that he must outdo Cesar Jiménez at every turn in order to seek even *equal* favor with Captain Diaz.

Lopez said now, "I see a chemist's report there on your desk, Captain Diaz. Has it anything to do with the case we're on now?"

From the pile of documents Diaz withdrew the sheet in question. This was the lean and hungry Lopez, trying once more to steal a march on his partner.

"As it happens, yes," he told Lopez, who was leaning forward nearly to the point of tumbling from his chair. "According to the chemist's report, the button was found soiled with certain foreign particles. Among them —tar, methane, benzine,

hydrogen sulphide, coal, coke and carbon."

"Factory particles," said David Lopez swiftly.

"My thought at first, as well," said Diaz. "But what sort of factory? Any ideas on that, Lopez?"

Lopez rubbed at his scar a moment. Then he said, "Several. Plastics, oil, metals-processing. The father of the dead girl owns a plastics plant in Caguas."

"Yes he does," said Diaz. "Might be a good idea to take a run out there, don't you think?"

"Maybe not just yet," said the fast-thinking Lopez. "Does the report indicate which element or elements was found to be most prevalent on the button?"

Captain Diaz nodded. Lopez was thinking solidly.

"As a matter of fact, the elements found in more abundance on the button were those of coal and coke."

"Then it is more than likely the button was soiled at a coal or coke smelter," said young Lopez. "There is only one such plant on the island, the one at Ponce. I think I'll eliminate the other options for now and make a trip out to Ponce."

"If you think that's your best bet," said Captain Diaz, not leading his detective in one direction or the other.

"Yes, I'd like to try there

first," said Lopez. He paused. "Are we changing the determination on my initial report? About the manner of the girl's death?"

Captain Diaz drew out Lopez' preliminary report. The line after the heading *Manner in Which the Deceased Died* read, in Lopez' handwriting, *Jumped, fell or was pushed.*

Diaz looked steadily at the young detective. "Do you feel the determination ought to be changed, Lopez? In light of what we now know?"

"Well," said Lopez, slowly, "no, sir. At this point, we have no certain evidence or testimony to support any of the three."

"You'd better get going then," said Diaz, "if you want to arrive at the plant before the day-shift ends."

Sergeant Jiménez arrived back at Headquarters close on Lopez' heels. He reported also the blank drawn on the photograph of the button. And, as the streetwise Lopez had predicted, none of the city's notions shops sold any buttons of the type found clutched in the dead girl's hand.

In Diaz' opinion young Jiménez fared better against Lopez in homicides involving San Juan's upper middle class. That was why Diaz was genuinely surprised that

Jiménez was getting a much slower start in this matter than was David Lopez.

"Was the button sent along to the chemists' lab?" he asked. He did not lounge in his seat like David Lopez. Instead, he sat rather stiffly, still immaculate in a dark suit, accompanied with a black vest even in the stifling heat. With Jiménez, formality sometimes got in his way in investigations and at other times stood him in good stead.

Diaz now handed Cesar Jiménez the same chemist's report he had related to Lopez. The fastidious young detective spent a long minute at it, then handed the paper back.

"A prevalence of metals here. Captain Diaz. Could mean anything. Maybe the button was torn from some miner's garment—a jacket or coat of some kind."

Jiménez was drawing close enough to a key area of investigation now to be told just where his partner was sniffing. "Lopez has gone out to Ponce."

"The smelter plant!" said Jiménez. "There's a very good possibility that's where our arsonist-murderer will be found."

"Well, let's not all clutter up the same ground," said Diaz. "Have you assembled any other hunches about this case?"

"I have, sir, yes," said Cesar Jiménez. "If this button is found to have come from a shirt or jacket of a factory worker, then the whole issue of his guilt in the killing might be a little implausible."

"How do you mean, Jiménez?" said Diaz, one eyebrow rising.

"Well, sir, I refer to the rigidity of the class structure here on the island. That a mere factory worker would become involved, with let entirely alone know, a girl like Casandra Gonzalez is a bit hard to swallow."

"But," countered Diaz, cleverly, "you've dated the shop girls in your young time. If Sergeant Lopez' rumors can be believed."

That drew a mild blush to Jiménez' cheeks and Captain Diaz wondered if the young detective knew what he was driving at.

"Well, sir," came the reply, somewhat sheepishly, "it's been my short experience that it is easier to move down the social ladder than up. It's a fact of life I am not pleased to indicate. But nevertheless, it is a fact of life."

"So it is, Jiménez. So then, you are *inferring* something from all this?"

"Just the obvious, sir—that a consortation or an acquaintanceship between the dead girl

and a factory worker is unlikely."

"I agree," said Diaz. "But we'll wait and see what Lopez brings back to us."

What Lopez returned with was hardly a major advance. But it was something worth noting as the three of them convened in Diaz' office at seven p.m.

"First of all," said Lopez, quickly getting to work, "the button appears to have come from the smelter plant, all right. Someplace else, possibly—but the smelter *very probably*. I talked with several foremen at the plant, including a Manuel Rivas. He is the foreman in the Ovens Shop, where the raw ore is initially melted.

The men who work in this shop all wear fireproof jackets which have buttons identical to the one found in the dead girl's fist. These jackets are worn in several areas of the plant, but they are predominantly worn by lidmen."

"Lidmen," said Diaz. Cesar Jiménez seemed miffed by the bulk of data his friendly adversary had acquired. Diaz silently enjoyed the interplay of emotions.

"Lidmen, throughout their shifts, range back and forth atop a battery of hot brick ovens," explained David Lopez.

"They wear wooden pallets beneath their shoes and rubber masks over their faces to filter out the dust and some of the smoke and gasses. A lidman's job is to catch the larry cars that run along the oven roofs on rails, pull off the lids of the oven-tops with six-foot-long iron bars, dump the coal and coke from the larry cars and then replace the lids. In all, the plant employs ten lidmen for the various shifts. I've got their names and addresses."

"What about the jackets?" said Diaz.

"You mean, did I check for missing buttons? Impossible. The lidmen pay five dollars for their fireproof jackets, so they aren't accountable for them. Some store them in their lockers, some take them home. There's no way to check them all for missing buttons. And besides, half the jackets are worn with buttons missing—on shift, anyway."

It was an impressive bit of work and Diaz told him so. Jiménez was pouting like a child left out in the rain and so Captain Diaz drew him into the heart of things once more.

"Have you any theories, Jiménez, about the elimination of suicide as the manner of death?" Captain Diaz knew either man could speak to this simple issue—but it seemed to

him that it was Jiménez who now could most be nourished by the tossed bone.

Jiménez was equal to the question. "Yes, sir, I think I have that matter pretty much worked out in my mind. Most of the young people who successfully escaped the Gonzalez house from the main floor were shown safe exits by the dead girl herself. And yet Casandra Gonzalez did not follow in their footsteps, but was found beneath a patio opposite the dining room.

"In the clutter and confusion of people and in the fog of smoke, she must have been taken to the patio forcibly by someone. The father indicated in his statement that there was no reason for the girl to want to take her own life and that she was an intelligent, responsible young woman. Even a despondent person won't choose suicide if that person is reasonably responsible."

Captain Diaz was pleased to see his two detectives brought back even on their separate scores. "So we scratch jumped from our possibilities."

"And we can do the same for *fell* on the same grounds," said Lopez.

"I agree with David," said Jiménez, somewhat reluctantly.

"So what have we, then?" summed Captain Diaz. "We

have a fire deliberately set by a murderer in order to cover his killing."

Both young men nodded almost simultaneously.

"The next order of business then," said Diaz, "is the questioning of the ten lidmen concerning their whereabouts on the evening of the fire."

Lopez split his list of names and addresses with Jiménez.

"You won't be able to get to them all tonight. Late guests are rarely welcome in any house, no matter what their business. Work at it for two hours and then begin fresh in the morning."

Both young detectives nodded, rose and left. Alone, Diaz made some fresh coffee and pondered what Lopez had said about the distances between the classes. It was a valid point, but Diaz would let time and interviews take care of it one way or the other.

THE NEXT DAY was Diaz' day off and he rose late in his cabana at *La Perla*. The district was also one of the city's chief slums, with poor street paving and the air a maze of chaotic, dangerous electrical wiring above tin-roofed shacks. Diaz' house above the beach lay a few blocks outside this circle of poverty—but the misery and hopelessness could be seen and

heard by him daily like the overhearing of a neighbor's loud argument.

At ten a.m., Diaz put on shorts and canvas shoes and got out his salt water fishing gear and walked down to the beach via the switchback of stone stairs. Within fifteen minutes he hooked a plump sea bass. Fish were always easier to catch than criminals.

When he returned to the house, Mrs. Delgado had arrived to clean. She came once a week and occasionally Captain Diaz' day off coincided with her cleaning day. She was a husky, kind woman who also lived in *La Perla* and a no-nonsense type. Over the years, he had learned to stand clear of harm's way.

"*Buenos días, Capitán.*" She didn't like the looks of his sea bass at all. "You are putting that in the sink? *Si?*"

"I'll put it on the back porch for now, *Señora Delgado*," the captain said meekly, retrieving the fish.

Her smile gave him absolution. "*Bueno, bueno.*"

She began slyly speaking about the matter that still had all San Juan talking. She knew she could speak freely to Diaz about such matters. Captain Diaz himself spoke freely about his cases to the good citizens of San Juan because amid them

often lived the criminals he sought.

"This business of the young girl's death," she said as she was set to defrosting the ten-year-old refrigerator. "*Malo* business. *Mucho malo.*"

"Yes, it's very bad," Diaz agreed.

"To burn down an entire house, to kill people like that without discrimination. Behind it is the mind of a madman, you can be sure, *Capitán.*"

Diaz nodded as he poured out some coffee.

"Have you any suspects yet?" Mrs. Delgado asked.

"We have some evidence which points in the direction of the smelter at Ponce. We think a lidman in the Ovens Shop may be involved."

"The smelter is nasty work. *Capitán.* I should know. My husband's brother worked in one to buy his taxicab. He was always coughing from the gasses and the smoke. My husband says his brother's lungs will be damaged the rest of his days."

Mrs. Delgado's chattering went dead abruptly, as if her words had suddenly dredged up something important from her memory.

"*Capitán!* There is a young boy living in the *favela* who works as a lidman!"

Diaz' heart did a jump. "At the smelter in Ponce?"

"I think so. Yes, I'm *sure* his mother has mentioned that to me! She is Mrs. Silva. And the boy is named Chico—Chico Silva."

"And they live close to you, did you say?"

"*Por supuesto!* Only two houses down the street! On the Avenida Visconde, at Number one hundred fifty-six."

Diaz flew to a kitchen table and snatched up a nub of pencil and a small writing pad and quickly wrote down the name and number. He now recalled the name of Chico Silva from the list Lopez had compiled after his talk with the foreman at the smelter.

Then the matter did not seem so urgent any longer. Either Lopez or Jiménez would be dropping in on Chico Silva today, perhaps had already. But Diaz wanted to learn more about the boy. Mrs. Delgado seemed in a mood to gossip and no harm could come from it.

"The Silva boy," he said, "what sort of boy is he, in your opinion?"

The woman's eyes hooded briefly, like a small dark cloud passing swiftly over the face of the sun. "*Malo rufian*, that one," she said lowly. "It is what I hear. A little—how do you say? Gangster, yes? A little gangster."

"He has stolen cars and takes

wallets from the American tourists in the cantinas, the beerhalls. And he runs with a *cuadrilla*, a gang. Four of them. Their names I do not know. But I can point them out when I see them. They are all *barbaro*, all loathsome boys."

"Has Chico Silva girl friends?" said Diaz. "Or any special one that you know?"

"One girl he is seen with often, *si*. She is named Carmen Caravelas. She is a restaurant waitress."

"Would you know where she lives?" said Diaz.

"I am sorry, Capitán. But she comes to the street often. They say she even stays at the Silva house overnight at times, which has caused bad feelings between Chico and his mother. The father is dead, you know."

"Are there brothers and sisters to Chico?"

"No, there is just Chico and his mother. And Carmen Caravelas. The situation there is *malo*, I can tell you. There is very bad blood there between the three of them."

It seemed more and more to captain Diaz that he should personally follow up on Chico Silva. Even on his day off.

"I think I'll change and go in to work," he said.

"But *el lobina*," said Mrs. Delgado. "The fish."

"Take it home for your fami-

ly, Mrs. Delgado. I do insist."

"You are a kind man, Capitán." The woman blushed.

"*De nada.*"

But Captain Diaz was not to get far, for the telephone suddenly rang. It was kept on the kitchen table and he snatched it up impatiently.

"Captain Diaz," he said, with mild irritation.

The voice on the line brought him back to calmer senses. It was Sergeant Lopez.

"I have just made an arrest in the case of Casandra Gonzalez," he told Diaz. "I know it was done without your authorization, but the evidence against the suspect seems too overwhelming. I am taking him down to Headquarters now, in case you want to be there."

"Indeed I do," said Diaz, not questioning young Lopez' actions. Lopez knew the rules of evidence and never had he made an arrest where there was not strong evidence to support it. "Who have you arrested?"

"One of the young lidmen from the smelter at Ponce."

"And his name?"

"His name is Chico Silva," said Sergeant Lopez.

THERE WAS a file on Chico Silva. There were nine juvenile arrests against him and they ranged from curfew violations to rifling parking meters for

small change. In each instance, Silva had been released in the custody of his mother. He was now twenty-three. There was no adult record against him.

David Lopez' collection of evidence against Chico Silva looked very incriminating on the surface. In a board shed at the back of the Silva house on the *Avenida Visconde*, Lopez had found four empty gasoline cans. They were five-gallon cans. It looked bad for Chico Silva.

The contents closely approximated the amount of gasoline judged by the arson investigators to have been used in the gutting of the Gonzalez estate. And there was more damaging evidence. Also in the shed was found Silva's fireproof jacket, a laundry tag proving it was his beyond any doubt. And with a metal button missing.

Further against his credit was the fact of his stoic silence on his whereabouts on the evening of the arson fire and the murder of Casandra Gonzalez.

In accordance with normal procedures, Diaz allowed Sergeant Lopez to interrogate his own prisoner. Diaz, when it came to the questioning of suspects, had never held to the heavy-handed approach. Anger and rage, he firmly believed, often got in the path of reason

and the logical flow of testimony—and also tended to make rabid belligerents of suspects. The soft word, he was fond of saying, often got the burro out of the road.

Sergeant Lopez talked with Chico Silva twice that afternoon, in two one-hour sessions. He then reported back to Diaz, who immediately read exasperation in the detective's eyes and expression.

"He isn't breaking from his original story and he's not accounting for his actions and whereabouts on the night in question. He denies any knowledge of the gasoline cans. He says they were planted at his house by the real killer."

"And he denies any knowledge of Casandra Gonzalez?" said Captain Diaz. "He denies ever having met her?"

"He does, sir."

"What else?"

"As for the fireproof jacket, he admits to its ownership," said Lopez, "but he insists he never has taken his work-clothing home. I should have a talk with his mother on that point and with his fellow workers at the smelter as well."

"He says the jacket was probably taken from his locker at the plant and placed in the shed to further incriminate him. There are no locks on the lockers at the smelter and so

there is a thin possibility it happened that way."

Diaz let his young detective down as easily as he could. "If he did not know the dead girl," he told Lopez, "then your motive flies out the window. And it couldn't have been anyone else at the party the killer was after because Casandra Gonzalez was thrown over that patio wall."

"We'll have to release Chico Silva, then," said Lopez, dejectedly.

"Within twenty-four hours, yes. Unless a stronger case can be made against him."

But Lopez was not so willing to give up his prisoner. "Captain," he said, "he *could* be lying when he says he did not know the dead girl. He *could* be placed in her company by *anyone*."

"But by *someone*," said Diaz. "Take Silva into Interrogation and ask him to give you the work and home addresses of his steady girlfriend, Carmen Caravelas."

Lopez' jaw dropped a bit upon hearing this suggestion. "How do you know so much about this case, when *we're* the ones out in the field?"

"I have an inside informant," Captain Diaz said.

Cesar Jiménez returned to Headquarters a bit after six p.m. When he learned from

Diaz that an arrest had been made by Lopez, he was openly crestfallen.

"Luck of the list only," Diaz told him. "Anyway, Chico Silva has been released."

"He wasn't kept the twenty-four hours?"

"There was no need of it. If he runs, he'll be all the more guilty. And if he stays in San Juan, he'll be available for arrest when the bulk of evidence supports such an event."

"What is Lopez on now?" Jiménez asked.

"He is talking to young Silva's mother about the fact that Chico never brought his work-clothes home. And then he intends to ask some questions of Chico Silva's girl friend about the company he keeps."

Once again, young Cesar Jiménez exuded the hapless look of a man whose hands were tied.

FROM MRS. SILVA, Sergeant Lopez learned that her son had spoken the truth about never having brought his workclothes home from the smelter. Further, persistent questioning by Lopez of Carmen Caravelas brought from her the real reason why Chico Silva had been reluctant to explain his whereabouts on the night of the murder of Casandra Gonzalez. She did not want him charged

with a killing he could not possibly have done.

On that evening, she said, Chico Silva and the small *caudilla* with which he ran were out stealing automobile parts from several San Juan wrecking yards. Diaz felt compassion for Sergeant Lopez. All his fine suppositions had fallen into the dust at his feet.

With Chico Silva's release, they seemed to have been brought back to the starting point. Cesar Jiménez then voiced an idea to Captain Diaz, who heard him out and pronounced it wouldn't damage anything to try. He would have to identify the dead girl's closest friends among those who had attended the party. Diaz would have to pave some way for him with the personnel manager at the smelter. But it was worth a fair try.

Owing to Jiménez' hunch, both Captain Diaz and the professionally curious Sergeant Lopez stayed late at Headquarters. When Jiménez returned a bit after nine p.m., there was no mistaking the soft beam spread across his face. Diaz thought Lopez looked precisely like a petulant child struggling through the endurance of a younger brother's birthday party.

"Those photographs we had made of the metal button were

what set me thinking," Jiménez explained. "I called the father of Casandra Gonzalez and learned from him her closest friends. I then went back to Ponce and saw the Personnel Manager at the smelter, a Mr. Calvo.

"He allowed me to have copies of the file identification photographs of all the workmen employed in the Ovens Shop. I then showed these photographs to the five young people Señor Gonzalez indicated where his daughter's closest friends. I had photos of the ten lidmen, plus oven tenders, larry car operators, gauge technicians."

"So, so?" said an impatient Sergeant Lopez. He wanted the candles on the cake blown out and have done with it all.

"Not a *single one* of the young people could identify any of these workmen as ever having been seen in the company of Casandra Gonzalez," said Jiménez. "But *another* photograph gained unanimous recognition among them."

David Lopez leapt into his partner's narrative abruptly. "The man I talked to at the smelter about the metal jacket button! The foreman of the Ovens Shop, Manuel Rivas!"

Pained a bit to have his main point stepped upon, Cesar Jiménez smiled tightly and nodded. Lopez looked the better

for it; at least he had been allowed to blow out one of the birthday candles.

"Their affair took place last summer," elaborated Jiménez. "It enjoyed only a brief life. Rivas met Casandra Gonzalez at a public bathing beach near Guayama in the south, where he was taking his annual vacation.

"Casandra skipped away one afternoon from a private enclave nearby, where she was spending a week with rich university chums. The estate had its own private beach, but Casandra Gonzalez became bored or curious or simply wanted to go off slumming.

"Who know what her reasons were then. But they became cruelly clear later, after she met Manual Rivas at the public bathing beach."

They had both caught the word.

"*Cruelly?*" spoke Captain Diaz for both himself and for Lopez.

"Casandra Gonzalez became friendly with Rivas on the beach. One thing led to another, and she invited him to come up to the house that evening. Just a small gathering of some young people, nothing formal. Around eight o'clock, she told him."

Captain Diaz could now see the ominous dark cloud lurking

behind the silver lining, but he allowed Jiménez to finish his narrative without interruption.

"Poor Manual Rivas! He took a shave and a shower and dressed in faded denims and a flowered sport shirt and leather sandals without socks. At around seven-thirty he walked down the white beach the half-mile to the estate, then up the tall flight of stone stairs and into a large garden at the rear of the house.

"Had he given it up at this point, had he come to his senses and turned back, he would have been saved. But Rivas, eager to see this young woman again, was blind to the nearing reality. He kept on, down a winding path of stones and finally up another flight of stairs and onto a large patio, flush into the eye of his personal nightmare.

"What Manuel Rivas she was not a *small gathering of friends, nothing formal*. What met his eyes were fully sixty guests gathered for a formal dinner-dance, attired in evening dresses and black ties."

When Cesar paused and then continued to reveal what he had learned, there was a new color in his voice, delicately applied, to be sure. But Captain Diaz was beginning to understand the nuances of verbal and physical expression in his young protégés. He could iden-

tify this feeling in Jiménez' tone to a word. And that word was 'disgust.'

"Among them, only one young woman could bring herself to tell me what took place next in the house above the beach at Guayama," continued Jiménez. "The guests—*fed off him*. They encircled him in small groups, like small squadrons of blood-hungry *caribe*, like *piranha*, and ate at his sensibilities.

"They asked Manuel what his profession was and where he had gone to university. They asked his feelings on the intellectual music of Pablo Casals and the current state of Puerto Rican classical music.

"They asked what Spanish painters he was familiar with. Was it Goya's irony he preferred? Velázquez' enigmatic statements? Picasso's daemonic improvisations? What were his views on the motion that Picasso was not only the painter but the novelist of his era? And could he speak to the quantitative realities found in Raphael's brimming *Young Cardinal*?"

They assailed Rivas without mercy, Jiménez explained, turning him first this way and then that, pulling him into one small pocket of viciousness and then over to another. Which of the Puerto Rican and Spanish

novelists did he find relevant to the times? Which biographers, historians, poets? Hadn't he been seen that summer with so-and-so at Lucerne or Monaco? Or had it been down the coast at Cannes for the films?

Someone thrust him a glass of red wine and asked if he would resolve the argument as to whether it was a Reserva Especial bottling of Spanish Rioja, vintage 1966 or 1967 or some other year? And what did he think of a Spanish Diamante another had drunk on the previous weekend?

"The girl said it was a brutal game," Jiménez concluded, his disgust undiminished. "Poor Manuel was humiliated beyond any understanding of that word. And in those pitiable clothes, looking like some beggar beachcomber wandered into the house to plead for scraps of food!

"Finally, when he could take no more of these subtle abuses, he broke from their sadistic clutches and fled back across the room and out onto the patio, the derisive laughter burning out his soul. The girl told me Rivas paused at the top of the stairs back down to the beach to glance back at this crowd of elegant young people, amused in their cruelty.

"If he did not pick out the

laughing face of Casandra Gonzalez, he knew perfectly well it had been *her* game they had all played to. She was the Judas goat who had led Rivas to his private *abattoir*, to his slaughterhouse."

"He waited a year," said David, "and he was fully prepared to wait longer. He found out that Casandra Gonzales lived here in San Juan. How he learned about the party is harder to tell."

"Maybe he had been reading the social pages of the daily newspapers religiously. Perhaps news of its being held appeared in a brief article." Jiménez raised his eyebrows indicating anything was possible.

"On this occasion," added Diaz, "he went around to the Gonzalez house first, to check the attire of the guests. Then he returned home, dressed in proper clothing and loaded the gasoline into his car. His summer of vengeance had arrived."

Lopez nodded grimly. "He got the gasoline cans into the house somehow without notice, made his preparations in the basement, even was able to wash an upstairs hallway with it without being seen. A man made insane and frantic with that much hatred could have it all done in minutes."

"When the smoke and flames reached the upstairs floors,"

finished Jiménez, "Manual fell in with the panic-torn crowd. Perhaps he even recognized some of them from the summer of his humiliation. In any case, it was only his Judas goat he wanted, only the young woman who had called the cruel game. He found Casandra Gonzalez in the dining room and in the confused, mindless traffic and thick smoke, dragged her off to the patio behind the band platform and pitched her over the stone balustrade to her death."

Diaz could find no fault with any of this grim supposition. "The jacket button he placed in her hand after leaving the house, traveling around to that side on foot while all the guests were scrambling for their lives on opposite sides of the house.

No one would have seen him, no one at all. He left then, taking the gasoline cans with him to be placed in the shed at the house of Chico Silva when he'd got Chico's fireproof work jacket from his locker at the smelter plant."

"By trying to implicate poor Chico Silva, Manuel Rivas took the brush into his own hand and laid the paint that put him in a corner-trap," said Cesar Jiménez. "Had he not called attention to the smelter plant with the jacket button, his crime might have gone unsolved for all time."

"No," disagreed Captain Diaz, becoming in this sad moment the instructor. "You'll learn in time and experience that every murderer leaves his links and his ties to the crime."

It was with a touch of wistfulness that Sergeant Lopez spoke again about the cruel disparity between the classes.

"Poor Manuel Rivas! I have sympathy for him in a way. I know the hatred he must have felt, how it must have built in him from summer to summer.

There was truth in what Lopez said—but for the moment philosophy would have to take a rear seat to duty. Perhaps they would find Manuel Rivas drunk at his home, or raving mad. Perhaps he might even crack and speak his guilt without prodding, even tell them about the evening in Guayama a long, sad summer ago, when he had been stripped so cruelly of his pride. They might even find at his home, strong evidence of his crime. If evidence existed, it would be found.

Captain Diaz looked at his watch. The hour was late, but not too late. He rose from his chair, arranged his necktie and put on his suitcoat. Both David Lopez and Cesar Jiménez did the same, the business now at hand going unspoken. Each man knew there was a painful arrest to be made.

The Confession

by SAM WILSON



Dark, indeed, are the ways of death — but darker still is the gentle dying of those who make death a way of life...

JED STONER awoke in the middle of the night, the covers twisted and tangled about him, and screamed into the dark. Then he fought his way out of the spiderweb of blankets, and rushed to find the light switch.

Even after his tiny, one-room hotel apartment was illuminated, Jed Stoner stood there,

braced against the fading green wallpaper for a long while before returning to the bed. Still shivering in his sweat-drenched pajamas, he sat against the headboard, huddled, bony knees against his chest, and fixed his gaze across the room on the torn brown windowshade half drawn down the window that overlooked the fire escape. And waited for dawn.

Then he would have to tell them. Then he would have to make a full confession. Perhaps they would be easy on him, perhaps not. It didn't matter. He couldn't last another night with the horrible dreams flooding his mind, feeding on his soul. If he told all, maybe the nightmares would go away. Maybe, for once in a very long string of fear-shattered nights, he would be able to sleep until day.

At first, it was very simple. He had no qualms about it; he supposed his victims deserved their fate, and he was well-enough paid for each job. In fact, the occupation of hired killer had had a certain fascination for him, then. The power of life and death was exhilarating, and he had never known himself to be a man of conscience.

Then, one day in a restaurant, one the many men and women he had efficiently dispatched walked in as he was

cutting into a steak. Or so he thought. Jed Stoner had left his table and hurried over to grab the man rudely from behind, then quickly apologized when the startled stranger turned and he did not recognize him.

That was the start of it. He began to see other faces, too. In shops, theaters, public buildings, cabs, sidewalk cafes. When he saw the last man he had put to death, one morning, in his bedroom, Stoner finally accepted the fact that he was losing his mind.

He sold his house and left the city, but the phantoms trailed him everywhere, never letting him rest. He couldn't keep a job, his money ran out, and finally he wound up here, in this shabby, run-down hotel. But there was no escape.

Days turned into weeks, weeks into months, months into years, running together like wet paint on an abstract artist's canvas. He had no idea how long he'd been here; he only knew he had to be free of the demons that tortured him night after night. He couldn't take it any longer.

When the sun lay in rectangles across the wooden floor, after an eternity of waiting, Jed Stoner came down from the bed and dressed. He left the hotel and walked down the streets, and arrived at last at the police

station. He hesitated only a moment before climbing the steps. Inside, he went directly to the desk sergeant.

"I have a confession to make," he said.

Captain Jensen and Lieutenant Fryer watched the little man leave the interrogation room. They had been about to have breakfast when Jed Stoner had been ushered in. Fryer was new to the department, and waited for Jensen, who was shoving some papers into a drawer, to lead the way out.

"Say," he said, "what was that all about anyway? I never quite understood what he was talking about."

"Oh, don't worry, you'll see enough of him. He comes in every three or four months and confesses to killing people."

"A nut, huh?"

"No, he really has killed at least a dozen. He was very good."

"But then why . . ." Fryer began, not knowing how to phrase the question.

Jensen looked at him and shrugged. "I guess he just snapped, went over the edge, poor guy. Oh, you mean why don't we arrest him? What for? He used to be state executioner."

Jensen closed the drawer. "Let's go," he said.

DEATH IS MY PASSENGER

by CHARLES W. RUNYON

Fearless of traffic cops and trucks alike, Breeze drove his five female carpool passengers to and from work with a fine disregard for life and limb. But when one of his ladies was murdered, Breeze began to learn what terror is all about.

OLD MRS. VOIGT was out of the building. She's heavy in the hips and legs, so she crab-walked down the steps sideways. I fired up the engine and eased to the curb as she came off the last step. Helen Jorgensen threw open the door and Vera Thrush pulled her inside. I let out the clutch when I heard the door slam. The squall of rubber merged with Mrs. Voigt's wail.

"Breezy, you don't even let a body get comfy."

Large styrofoam dice swayed from the rear-view mirror. They showed six-and-six as I looped the traffic line oozing toward the expressway. Dennis Jackson, who works in the engineering section, laid twenty feet of rubber on the shoulder

getting around me, then dawdled at the stoplight until it linked amber. He shot me a bird as he pulled out, leaving me snagged on the red.

I took out my comb and ran it through my hair, counting heads in my rear-view mirror. Three in the back seat, two up front besides myself. I slid the comb back in my shirt pocket and hunched down to watch the overhead traffic light so I could get a quick jump.

Vera Thrush leaned forward from the back seat and blew her warm voice in my ear. "Relax, Breeze. We'll all live longer."

"We'll also miss the light at Forty-sixth and get caught in the five-fifteen rush at Gibbs Electronics—and that means



you're all twenty minutes late getting home."

The light flashed green and my foot jumped off the clutch. I crammed the shift into second and jerked it back into third as I rocked into the high-speed lane. The needle bumped sixty.

I eased off on the gas and

heard Vera's ragged sigh, "I don't know why I don't buy a bus ticket."

"You like the danger, the uncertainty," I said. "Never knowing if you'll see your family again, or the plant."

"That last part *I* can do without."

This was a soft murmur meant for my ears alone. It came from Gloria Bass, a gorgeous brunette who sat in the middle of the front seat. It had taken a couple of weeks to work it out so she "accidentally" sat there. Every time I

shifted down I touched the back of my hand to her nylon-sheathed thigh. That's as far as it ever went, but she kept sitting there, and I took that as an encouraging sign for the future.

From the top of the hill I saw that the intersection at Forty-sixth had a tail on it three blocks long. We had, as I'd expected, caught the five-fifteen rush out of Gibbs.

"Two out of four this week," I muttered, braking the heap to a stop.

"You're slowing down in your old age, Breeze," said Vera.

I grunted and eyed the oncoming traffic. I saw a gap between a Red Gremlin and a Ford Camper; fired myself through the slot, crossed the left-hand lane and bounced into the alley behind the Marathon station. The old brick pavement was warped like a roller coaster and so narrow I had only six inches clearance on either side. The car went *whoomp! whoomp! whoomp!* as it bottomed out on the shocks.

A lot of yelling came from the riders, and Mrs. Voigt moaned, "Oh, my heart!"

I glanced back and saw her clutching the strap with her right hand, her powder-blue headscarf hanging across half her face, while her mouth gaped open and shut like a fish.

I knew what she was trying to say, so I slowed down.

I'd hoped to find Sixth Street clear, but that's the trouble when you pioneer a new route. The word had leaked out, the intersection was jammed. I saw Dennis Jackson's electric-blue Olds immobilized in the middle of the pack and chuckled sardonically. I cut across Sixth, bounced through another alley, and came out on Fifth. I cut back to the right and wheeled out on Rogers Street about five minutes up on the rest of the idiots.

Mrs. Riggs was the first one out. She's small, plump, with gray hair and a warm smile for everyone. She spent every lunch hour shopping, so we went through the usual two-minute delay while she stood outside the car and Vera handed out her packages from behind the back seat.

Mrs. Riggs said, "Thank you, Vera," each time a package was laid in her arms. Then she said, "Goodbye, Breeze, Goodbye, girls!" and started up the sidewalk. Her fat little poodle bounced off the pillared front porch and tried to climb her legs. Mrs. Riggs stooped to pick him up and dropped most of her packages.

I circled the block and came out on Rogers again, angled across two lanes of traffic and

slid into the left-turn lane just as the arrow flashed green. I did a left onto Byers, a through street marked only by a couple of *Yield* signs. Helen Jorgenson lives in the second block from the end, in a brick house with disgusting yellow trim around the doors and windows.

She shares it with her husband, who drives a long-haul truck. She's the one who gave me my nickname. I told her the first time she rode that I'd waft her home like a breeze, and that was the night we nearly got rolled up like a paper wad between two tandem diesels. She used to tell me when her husband was away, but I never seemed to catch the hint. She's a bony-faced woman with reddish-blond hair. Also I'd seen her old man out mowing the yard once and hadn't liked the size of his biceps.

I said, "Goodbye, Helen," and she nodded once and walked up the sidewalk. She'd been frosty ever since Gloria started riding.

I kept straight on Byers until I hit the asphalt truck route that runs alongside the railroad yards. I rolled up two miles in two minutes, then cut back up on Trowbridge Avenue to drop Vera Thrush. She wears big hats which have to be stuck on with a hatpin, which she always parks up behind the seats when she rides. Tonight she

spent a minute groping around back there, then got out of the car and said, "I guess the pin fell down behind the seat. Breeze, if you'll remember to look when you stop . . ."

"Right," I said. "I'll have it for you tomorrow."

She waved goodbye and that left two—Mrs. Voigt and Gloria. The old woman had thrown her head back on the seat and covered her face with a blue head-scarf. She always did it when she napped. She'd let her white leather-bound Bible slide off her lap, and that was normal too. I debated taking her home first and trying to lure Gloria to a bar for a couple of drinks and some fun later. I decided not, since it was Thursday and I was thirteen days away from my last payday. Even with the extra fifty a week from the carpool, my expenses leapfrog my income.

So I just turned on the 8-track and started off at a slow thirty-per. Gloria lit a cigaret and gave it to me, then lit one for herself. I always rack my brain for something to say at times like this, but nothing happens except that my throat gets very dry. So rather than say something stupid I say nothing.

As a matter of fact, I thought she rated something better than a mailroom clerk. I fully

intend to rise in my chosen profession—as soon as I decide on one—but for the present I have a feeling she's too rich for my blood. I'd go crazy trying to beat out the competition in that ratrace.

I stopped to let her out, then watched her go through the routine of tugging her wine-purple skirt down over her hips, switching her rump once-left and once-right.

"See you in the morning, Breeze," she said.

"Right, Goria. See you."

I watched her walk up the green cement sidewalk and enter the glass-fronted lobby. She lived in one of those swinging singles apartments with pool and lounge and everything you're supposed to need for the good life. I'd been to parties at those places and they're just like any other kind of party. The chance of scoring with a really neat chick are about the same as outside, which is to say nil, because the neat ones are already tied up.

So . . . that left old Mrs. Voigt. I called over my shoulder, "Have you home in two minutes?" She didn't answer. In the mirror I saw that she'd slumped sideways in the seat and dropped her Bible onto the floor. She didn't look like she was in danger of falling, and I was double-parked outside the

condominium anyway, so I pulled out.

It was only three blocks to her rooming house, and I drove slow so she wouldn't pitch forward. She was pushing sixty, and I figured she needed all the rest she could get after a hard day on the assembly line.

Five minutes later I eased to the curb and said, "You're home, Mrs. Voigt."

Usually she struggled up with a choked snort and a bewildered look. This time—nothing. I reached back and shook her shoulder gentle.

She didn't feel right. I twisted around in the seat and lifted the head-scarf. Her face was an ugly, splotched gray. A trail of bloody saliva leaked out of her open mouth and down onto her lace collar. I took hold of her wrists and stared out through the windshield to avoid looking at her ghastly face.

She had no pulse. The dice on my mirror had stopped at two-and-one.

I must have sat there a couple of minutes staring at those dice, my brain like a dead battery. I didn't have the slightest notion what to do, because I'd never come up against a dead person before. You see a dead cat on the highway and you ignore it. A dead dog you take out in the back yard and bury it. But a dead person . . .

I got out my comb and ran it through my hair, which usually helps me think. I thought, *Well, she really did have a bad heart after all.* I should have believed her, I shouldn't have cannonballed through that alley, or maybe it was when I did that squealing left turn onto Rogers that her heart gave its last and final lurch. . .

I put out my cigaret and walked up the short sidewalk. My heels made a ringing echo on the wide wooden veranda. One of the porch-posts held a glittery silver-and-black sign reading ROOMS. A smudged and faded list of names was thumbtacked under the mailslot, but I couldn't read it, so I knocked on the door. I waited a minute and knocked again. A door opened at the side of the porch, and a long narrow nose appeared in the crack. I couldn't tell if it belonged to a man or a woman because he-she-it kept the night chain in place and looked at me from eyes set deep in gray pouches.

"Who you wanna see?"

The voice was female—not that it makes much difference when you get that far up in years. I said, "The—uh—family of Mrs. Voigt, if you please, Ma'm."

"There ain't any. She lives alone, like the rest of us."

Slam went the side door. I reached out and turned the knob on the front door, aware that she was watching me through the curtain. I had a feeling she'd call the cops the minute I stepped inside—then I thought, *Well, why not?*

I walked over to her door and hollered through the glass. "Could I use your telephone, please?"

The door opened just enough to let the words out, "There's a pay phone in the hall."

"Okay if I use it?"

"If you got a dime."

I stepped into a little anteroom and saw the phone at the foot of the stairs. The carpet was threadbare, and a gray film of dust covered everything except the banister, which was worn down to the wood and shiny.

I dialed the emergency number on the front of the telephone and heard a girl answer, "*Central Police Station,*" I pushed in a dime and noticed a door at the foot of the stairs swing open about an inch. I knew the old girl was listening, so I cupped my hand over my mouth and directed my voice into the mouthpiece:

"I'd like to report a death."

"Name and address please?"

"Well, her name is Voigt. She died in my car."

"Where is the body?"

"It's still in the car. Setting out at the curb."

"What was the cause of death?"

"Heart attack—I guess. She's all gray and blotchy."

"Street and number please?"

I stepped outside and looked at the number over the door, then went back and gave it to the girl. She said, "Don't touch the body. The patrolmen in your neighborhood will arrive shortly and take charge. Thank you."

I hung up and walked outside. Mrs. Voigt's face had darkened to the color of mud. I didn't want to sit inside with her, so I hoisted myself onto the front of the car and fired a nicotine stick.

The cops must have stopped for coffee because I burned up three cigarettes sitting there like a hood ornament. It started to get dark. Purple shadows drifted down through the naked oak branches, and I could see my breath under my nose. A prowler car came whoop-whooping down the street and cut in to the curb about twenty feet in front of my car. Two men got out and started up the sidewalk, black boots and fingertip-length coats.

I called, "Over here."

TWO FLASHLIGHT BEAMS hit me in the eyes. One floated toward me and the other went around

to my car. The first patrolman gave me a quick up-and-down with his beam and told me to stand up. Actually I had to get off the car and stand *down*, but I didn't bother to correct him. He wanted my name and address and I gave him that. When he flashed his light on his pad I saw he was a broad-faced kid about my age with red hair and a freckled Irish complexion.

"Who found the body?" he asked. "You?"

"I don't know if you could say I found her. She was one of my riders, and when I stopped to let her out she wouldn't wake up."

"I see. What was the approximate time of death? You got any idea?"

"I don't know the exact time. Somewhere between five-twenty and five-thirty. I was busy driving, and I thought she'd just dozed off—"

"Vic, c'mere a minute."

I heard the two muttering while they played the light on Mrs. Voigt's body. The old cop had bristly gray hair sticking out from under his hat. He started unbuttoning Mrs. Voigt's coat, so I turned my back. I gazed up the empty street and thought of everybody inside their homes eating supper and watching the evening news. My stomach growled, and I won-

dered what Mom was having...

The redheaded cop walked to the prowler car and the older officer came up to me. "See your chauffeur's license."

"I don't have one."

"You told my partner the old lady was a passenger."

"I meant she rides in my carpool."

"How many cars in this carpool?"

"Just mine."

"Okay, let's have your regular license."

I pulled the plastic rectangle out of my wallet and gave it to him. I had a feeling this was a routine hassle, something to do while waiting for the meat wagon. Fourteen of us hauled riders out of Hamphill Optics alone. We didn't hurt the taxis because our riders couldn't afford the fares anyway. We took most of our trade from the buses, and the bus drivers couldn't care less.

Anyway, the patrolman carried my license to the prowler car. I stood until my feet got cold and wondered how soon they'd get Mrs. Voigt out of my car. If they waited until she got stiff they'd have to cut her out with a torch. She'd had enough trouble dragging herself in and out while she was alive.

Pretty soon the older cop came back and stood looking at



me with his thumbs hooked in his leather belt. "Henley, you've got four moving violations against you, plus about

twenty-five unpaid parking tickets."

I looked down the pike of the future and saw fifty bucks a week gurgling down the drain. Nothing to what Mrs. Voigt had lost—but then a grain of sand in your own eye hurts worse than a rock dropped on another guy's head.

"You mean you're gonna lift my license because an old lady happened to have a heart attack in my car?"

"Heart attack?" The cop snorted. "Come here, boy."

I didn't want to get close to the body, but the officer nudged me forward while he beamed his light into the back seat. They'd left Mrs. Voigt's green cloth coat hanging open, and I saw a dark stain the size of a speedometer dial low on her left side. Protruding from the blotch was a metal shaft capped by a lustrous gray pearl.

I knew I'd found Vera's hat-pin.

I jumped back and whirled around. I couldn't help it. A pair of two-hundred-pound bodies hemmed me in. The older cop's face loomed out of the shadows like a rising moon.

"You must have thought we were pretty damn stupid, to try to pass that off as a heart attack."

I opened my mouth, but the younger cop fired a question be-

fore I could speak. "Why'd you do it?"

I gasped, "I didn't!"

"Then you better tell us who did, quick."

This was the older cop again. I managed to choke, "I—I didn't know she had a pin in her. Vera . . . she—"

"Vera did it?" asked the red-head.

"No. I don't know. It's her pin."

"Why would she kill the old lady?" asked the older copy.

"I didn't say she did. I said it was *her* pin!"

"You think she loaned it to somebody else so they could do it?"

"No! She didn't loan it. She lost it. She noticed it was missing when she got out. I said I'd find it tonight and return it tomorrow. You ask her. Ask anybody—all my passengers. I didn't take my hands off the wheel from the time we left the plant . . ."

I trailed off as a long gray limousine drifted in like smoke and stopped beside my car. A second patrol car pulled up in front of it and a black, unmarked Ford slid in behind. Both cops went to the black car and left me standing there.

I didn't know whether I was arrested or not. They hadn't handcuffed me or told me that everything I said would be used

against me, but I decided not to tease fate by moving around.

It wasn't hard to see who was in charge. A fat character about five-five got out of the unmarked car and stood looking at Mrs. Voigt. He kept both hands in the pockets of his open topcoat while the older patrolman flashed the light on her. Finally he leaned over and did something to the body, then stepped back and wiped his hands on his handkerchief. A photographer came forward and flashbulbs lit up the overhanging trees.

I didn't watch them load her into the hearse. The gray-haired patrolman was talking to the fat plainclothesman, who looked bored. He kept putting his hand to his mouth and I thought he was yawning, but then I saw his jaws moving and I realized he was chewing something.

The gray hearse pulled out, followed by a patrol car. The plainclothesman walked over to me and said, "Okay, Henley. Let's take a ride."

My heart dropped into the bottom of my stomach. I started back to the unmarked car and he said, "Unh-uh. We'll take your car."

I opened the door and then remembered, "They took my license."

"Yates, give the kid his

license. What the hell did you pull it for?"

The gray-haired patrolman handed me the plastic rectangle and mumbled: "Well, he was suspect—"

"Did you kill that old lady, kid?"

"No, sir!"

"See? You guys leave murder to the Homicide squad. Let's go, Henley."

We got in and I started the engine. I felt a cold draft on my neck and glanced into the back seat. For a second I saw Mrs. Voigt sitting next to the window—then it turned into a shadow.

"My name's Dawson," said the plainclothesman. "Why are you so nervous?"

I licked my lips. "I thought I saw Mrs. Voigt sitting back there, the way she always did, with her thumb stuck in between the pages of her Bible. She never read more than a couple of verses before she dropped off to sleep. That's why I never noticed she was dead. She never acted very much alive."

"You always talk this much, Henley?"

"No, that's nervousness."

"You gotta remember that anything you say can be thrown back in your face in court. So if you got anything to hide, keep your trap shut."

"I'm not hiding anything."

"Good. What's your first name?"

"Morton. My riders call me Breeze."

"Okay, Breeze. If you're not too nervous, put the car in motion."

Having a cop in the car raised hell with my timing. Pulling it down into third I clashed gears like I haven't done since I was fifteen. To cover up my embarrassment I asked, "You wanna go anywhere special?"

"Go back over your route. Mrs. Voigt was your last stop, right?"

"Right."

"Okay. Try the one you let off before that. We'll roll it up backwards."

I pulled into a driveway, reversed and started back toward Gloria's apartment. Dawson ripped the top off a cellophane packet and threw something in his mouth. When he chewed, it sounded like a horse walking on gravel.

"I do this because I quit smoking," he said.

"Oh,—yeah?"

He munched another mouthful and said, "I used to really burn up the nicotine. Three packs a day. Then I quit. Like that, I started to eat. I grew out of my clothes. I tried diets and went crazy. So I eat parched

corn. You wear yourself out before you get anything in your stomach. Good for the teeth, too."

He held out the bag but I shook my head. I pulled into the traffic loop which led to Gloria's apartment and parked outside the lobby.

Dawson just sat there. "Tell me what you know about her," he said.

I told him what impressed me: Long, soft wavy black hair, nice hips, nice legs; nice pair of bosoms. She smoked French cigarettes and wore a perfume that smelled like cactus blossoms. She had lavender eyes and a smooth ivory complexion.

Dawson gazed out at the deserted swimming pool, the trimmed shrubbery, the vines (plastic) which twined around the lobby.

"You know what one of these pads costs?" he asked.

"Quite a bit."

"About three bills a month. What does she do at—what's the name?"

"Hamp hill Optics. She works up on four."

"That doesn't tell me a damn thing."

"It's the executive department. She's secretary to Mr. Holt. He's vice president in charge of sales."

"And what did Mrs. Voigt do?"

"She was an inspector on the line."

"Inspecting what?"

"Well . . ." I shrugged. "Precision instruments for laboratories, that's what we make. Microscopes and things like that."

"Pretty valuable stuff?"

"Some of our instruments sell for thirty-five thousand dollars. But very few people have a use for 'em."

He said nothing to that, just sat looking into the lobby. After a minute a tall guy came out carrying a briefcase. He looked like a salesman in his creased gray suit, but I thought I'd seen him before. As he came up to my car, I recognized him as the driver of the unmarked police car.

He crawled in the back seat and started talking. "She's home. I called and said I'd gotten her number from a friend and wanted to meet her. She wasn't interested."

"Nervous?" asked Dawson.

"No, cool as hell. Said she planned to wash her hair and read a book. I said I'd call back later in case she changed her mind and she said don't bother."

It felt good to know that Gloria had given him the icy lip. Then Dawson asked, "Who pays her rent?"

"There's two other chicks liv-

ing in the same pad. I guess they split it three ways."

Dawson grunted and said, "Okay, Sergeant Dinwiddie. Who's next, Breeze?"

"Helen Jorgensen."

"Married or single?"

"Married."

"Better not ask her for a date then, Dinwiddie. Try to sell her some insurance. Okay, let's go."

Dinwiddie got out and I put the car in gear. As I drove, I asked Dawson what he was doing.

"This is just a first run," he said. "We check out the obvious. If anybody's packing, or getting ready to leave town, or seems unduly nervous, we mark 'em down as a double prime suspect and dig a little deeper. You interested in detective work?"

"Well . . . I am now."

"Good! You might learn something on this case. On the other hand you might not. Depends on how well you listen."

I LISTENED, but could hear nothing but the growling of my stomach. I remembered that Mom was having broiled liver and onions for supper. To a lot of people that's garbage, but it happens to be my favorite. I'm strange in other ways too.

Like when I stopped down the street from Helen's house, I started speculating which one

of my riders it would turn out to be. Which one did I *expect* it to be?

I couldn't answer that, so I asked myself, *Which one did I want it to be? Certainly not Gloria, that would nip our romance before it even budded. Vera Thrush, I liked.* Even though she ripped me up with insults, she knew how to take a joke in return.

But not Helen Jorgensen. She had a prickly, snarling quality, even when she tried to be nice. She carried trouble—and that was confirmed when Dinwiddie lunged out of her house. The hulking shadow of Helen's old man filled the doorway behind him.

He threw himself in the car, panting. "Wouldn't believe I sold insurance. Holy Christ, talk about suspicion!"

Dawson interrupted. "Did *she* believe you were an insurance man?"

"I don't know *what* she believed. She was busy trying to convince her husband she didn't know me from Julius Ceasar. I don't think she even noticed me."

"What do you say? Cross her off?"

"Yeah—tentatively."

"Right," said Dawson. "Drive on, Breeze."

Vera Thrush wasn't home. The baby-sitter came to the

door and told Dinwiddie she'd be at the corner bar. Dinwiddie found her holding down the end stool as if she'd taken a 99-year lease on it.

"Juice is an expensive habit," observed Dawson later in the car. "Does she do it much, Breezy?"

I bit my lip, but couldn't see any way out of telling the truth. "She carries a jug in her purse. She passed it around when we got hung up in a two-hour jam at the cloverleaf. We had a helluva time in the car."

"Mrs. Voigt too?"

"She had a rosy glow. That was before she got religion."

"How about—who's the next one?"

"Mrs. Riggs. She wasn't with us then. She only started riding three months ago."

"Let's go see her, shall we?"

Five minutes later, I pulled up across the street from a white-pillared house set back on a broad sloping lawn. An incandescent porch light made black cutouts of the shrubs and evergreens.

Dawson grunted softly and asked, "She live there alone?"

"She has a housekeeper who stays during the day. I don't know about nights."

"What does she do that she can afford a housekeeper?"

"You mean at the plant?"

"Okay—back at the plant," he said.

"She works in the employee's lounge. Or I should say out of it. She's the coffee-cart lady. Serves coffee, milk, rolls, doughnuts, stuff like that through the plant."

Dawson said nothing. He sat there eating parched corn while I fiddled with the dice and tried not to think about food. I kept thinking about diced carrots, cube steak, boxcars full of french fries . . .

After about ten minutes, Dinwiddie slid into the car and reported that Mrs. Riggs was not only in, but calm and collected and in no hurry to go anywhere. She had insisted that Dinwiddie drink a cup of coffee, and had even asked to see his insurance policies, until Dinwiddie confessed that he'd left them in his other briefcase, and would come back tomorrow night.

At that point Dawson interrupted to ask if he was sure Mrs. Riggs wasn't onto him.

"I don't think she was onto me," Said Dinnwiddie. "It's just a case of a friendly woman living alone who doesn't get many visitors."

"You agree with that, Breeze? She's a friendly lady?"

I nodded. "She's very popular at the plant. Dudes in the mailroom borrow money from her.

Some don't pay it back. She never hassles them."

"That so?" He crumpled a cellophane bag and shoved it into the trash bag under the dash. "Okay, Breeze, let's go get some food. A drive-in would be nice."

I drove to Freddie's, a seafood place with carry-out service. While we waited for our orders I realized that he hadn't let me out of his sight since he'd saved me from arrest. I decided to find out where the boundaries were, so I asked him if I could call Mom.

He said, "Sure, only don't tell her what happened."

I walked to the phone booth at the corner of the lot and was about to drop in my dime when his words sank in. I walked back to the car and asked:

"How can I say what I'm doing if I can't tell her what happened?"

"Tell her you're having dinner with a friend."

"I don't know if she'd believe a lieutenant from Homicide."

"You think I don't have friends, kid?"

"I don't mean that. What if she asks how we happened to run into each other?"

Dawson looked up at me and sighed. "Does your mother ever ask how you happen to run into people?"

"Hardly ever."

"Well then, go—take the risk,

lie if you must. Just don't spill the beans."

So I called Mom and no problem, she'd put some liver back for me and I was supposed to drive carefully and be home early and not forget I had to work tomorrow. I could have played a tape of my own side because it rarely varied from Thanks—I will—I won't.

I got back to the car as the food arrived. I put away a dish of fish and chips while Dawson shoveled in deep sea scallops, a bowl of oyster dressing, a basket of fried shrimp, a slab of apple pie and two scoops of ice cream. While he had coffee he told me he'd built his theory of crime detection on the techniques newspapermen use in getting a story.

"They look for the who-what-when-where-why-and-how. They gotta have all those to round off a story. I look for the same things, but I'm only after the 'who'?"

"Who' is the murderer?" I asked.

"That's right."

"Which is the what?"

"Somebody stuck a hatpin in the old lady's heart. That's 'what'. The why-when-where-and-how, we ain't got."

"We've got the 'how'. The hatpin."

"No, no. That's only the murder weapon. *How* did it get

stuck in there without anybody seeing it done? That's the question."

He took a big bite of pie and swigged it down with coffee. "I like to start with motive. Once I find out why a person was killed, I'm usually not far from finding the killer. Say the motive is jealousy. I automatically rule out strangers and most professional hoods. If the motive is theft, I rule out the well-to-do. I mean petty theft. Rich people steal too, but they won't risk it unless there's a pretty big pile and not much risk of getting caught.

"Say the motive here was hate. This wasn't what you'd call a passion killing, like you get between married folks and close relatives. This was planned down to the split second. Whoever did it was prepared to be one of five obvious suspects—to hang tough and brazen it out."

I started counting in my head—Gloria, Vera, Helen J. and Mrs. Riggs. That made four. It wasn't hard to figure out who was number five.

"You've ruled me out now?" I asked.

"I did that at the beginning,"

"Why? Not that I'm complaining—"

"When I heard your knees knocking together. I knew nobody that scared could pull off a

caper like this. Whoever did it had to be cool."

My face prickled with embarrassment. "Because I found the body, man. What would you get if you put my other passengers up against a corpse in the back seat?"

"Screams, yells, fainting spells, tears—and one of them would be faking it all the way." He tossed his paper cup in the littered tray. "Get rid of that stuff while I make a phone call."

When he came back to the car, he told me to drive back to the point of origin—Mrs. Voigt's rooming house. While I drove, he said he'd called the lab and gotten a report on the weapon.

"So now we've definitely got a murder-one," he said.

"What's that?" I asked.

"First-degree—premeditated. That wasn't a regular hatpin. That was a surgical probe made out of high-tensile steel alloy. Somebody stuck on a phony pearl."

I gasped. "Oh, Lord! Vera Thrush?"

"Not necessarily. There could have been a switch."

"So we rule out Vera?"

"We don't rule out anybody yet. Think about your other passengers a minute. How'd Mrs. Voigt get along with them?"



"Well—pretty good most of the time. After she got religion she didn't have much to say. She'd get in the car, open up the Bible, and drift off to sleep."

"Was she tight with any one particular passenger?"

"I don't think so."

"Who'd she sit beside?"

"She sat on the right, in the back. Vera sat in the middle. Mrs. Riggs sat on the left."

"Was it always that way?"

I frowned. "No. When Mrs. Riggs first started riding, three months ago, she sat in the middle. But Vera's cigarettes bothered her on certain mornings, so she moved next to the window so she could get fresh air."

"What does Vera Thrush do for a living?"

"She's in accounting. She hands out the paychecks."

"Helen Jorgensen?"

"I think she's in shipping. Yeah, that's it. Sometimes when we had a big shipment she'd have to work overtime and couldn't catch her ride."

"And Gloria—you said she worked for a vice-president?"

"Yeah. She couldn't have been involved."

"You got any idea how many times I've heard that?"

"No—a thousand?"

"Anytime anybody says that—then I bear down. I bear down really hard. So why couldn't Gloria have done it?"

"She was sitting beside me in the front seat."

"Couldn't have reached back and *zonk* with the hatpin?"

"No."

"Not even when you were bouncing through that alley? Or charging through a line of oncoming traffic? I heard about your citations. Left turn on red. Jumping the light at Thirty-eighth. Jumping the light at Forty-sixth. Passing twelve cars in a no-pass zone. You have any money left out of your paycheck after you pay your fines?"

"Sometimes enough for cigarettes."

"And you're trying to tell me

you know what goes on behind you?"

"It's like I know, when I think about it. I'm not listening, but I'm taking it in. I'd know if Mrs. Voigt was quarreling with the other passengers. And she wasn't. Anyway, I can't imagine a quarrel that would cause somebody to stick a hatpin in somebody else."

"Would you believe somebody killing his wife because she burned the toast? Or a guy plugging his neighbor with a forty-four magnum because the dog dug up his roses? Those things happened. When murder comes in, logic flies out the window. Because murder ain't logical."

I PULLED UP outside the rooming house and switched off the engine. The porchlight spread a daylight brilliance over the postage-stamp yard, but the house was dark except for a dim flickering glow against a downstairs curtain. I asked Dawson what he planned to do here.

"There's a connection," he said, "between Mrs. Voigt and one of your other passengers. So far we've missed it. Now we'll go see if we can find it among her effects."

Funny how little you know about somebody you've seen every working day for over a

year. Mrs. Voigt lived in a corner apartment with windows facing south and east. She'd covered the walls of her living room with photos of people dressed in the style of the Forties. Looking at the long dresses, the piled-up hair and the tight collars, I got the feeling she'd kept on living in those bygone years, and was just marking time in the present.

A uniformed policeman was guarding the apartment. Dawson told him he could take off, then started going through her little half-desk, taking out letters and reading a few paragraphs, then putting them back in the drawers.

Finally he slumped down in a chintz-covered easy chair and said, "She's got one relative—a father living in a retirement home in Arizona." He picked up a sheaf of receipts and rifled them like playing cards. "Cost her six bills a month to keep him at Desert View Ranch. That's heavy bread for a production worker."

"Maybe she owned stocks."

He shook his head. "No evidence of that. She didn't pay by check either. Postal money orders, which she bought every month with cash. She also paid a hundred-and-a-half for this apartment. According to her rent receipts she paid in cash. Now . . ." He held up a little

green booklet. "She drew two-fifty an hour at the plant. What did she do with her check? She put it in a savings account without cashing it. Can you put it together?"

"Sure. She had a cash income."

"Right. But from what?"

I shrugged, and Dawson stretched out his hand and picked up the phone. He dialed information, got the number of the Desert View Ranch, and asked for Theodore Voigt. From Dawson's end of the conversation, I knew they'd refused to call him to the telephone:

"*You can't?* Not even in case of emergency?"

After about ten seconds, Dawson said, "This is an emergency, Miss . . . or is it Missus? His daughter was found dead in suspicious circumstances."

Dawson listened a minute, then shook his head. "No, I don't wanna go into the circumstances right now. I'm Lieutenant Dawson, Homicide. Regulations say we gotta notify the next of kin . . . No, I'm not trying to pressure you, dear. I'm sitting in the middle of all her personal possessions and I found her father's name. Yes . . . Well, I appreciate your position, but I'd like to ask *him* a few questions . . ."

He listened a minute longer,

shook his head in disgust, and held the receiver out to me. I put it to my ear and heard a clipped feminine voice.

"You have your responsibility and I have mine, and mine is to my patients and yours is of course to find the murderer. In this case you'll have to do it without her father's help. He cannot walk or talk and has to be fed through a tube, so obviously..."

Dawson took the phone and said, "Thank you, dear, we'll be hearing from you, I'm sure." He put the phone on the hook and glared at me. "Those hypocrites. All that sweet talk about responsibility to the patient ends about one minute after the money stops." He ripped the top off a fresh packet of parched corn. Chewing seemed to calm his nerves, because he spoke in a musing tone.

"So—we deal with the evidence we got. The way it worked out, with you letting those people off one by one, if we can find out where it was done, we'll know when. I want you to think about that. Try to remember the last time you heard any sign of life from her. We'll cross off everybody who got out before that."

He went to the couch and lay down, pulled his hat over his eyes and muttered, "Let's both meditate for a spell."

Five minutes later I heard him snoring. I guess that's what he meant by meditation. Meditation for me was going over the whole trip in my mind and remembering every squeak, grunt and giggle.

After a half hour I shook him awake and asked, "Would she make any noise when she got stuck?"

He blinked, rubbed his eyes and yawned. "Probably, she'd gasp and moan and maybe even kick her legs a little bit. Why?"

"Just wondered."

He groaned and pulled his hat over his eyes again. I got busy with pencil and paper and drew a map of my route. Then I went through and marked every spot where I'd noticed Mrs. Voigt. The last thing I remembered her doing was hanging onto the strap as we bounced through the alley. And in that place I'd had all the passengers aboard.

I woke up the lieutenant and gave him this information. He growled without opening his eyes and turned his face to the back of the sofa. I went to the chair and tried to imitate his technique. Twice I nearly broke my neck but finally I got my head pillowled to where I slept more or less comfortably.

When I woke up, I thought I was having nightmares. There stood Mrs. Voigt in her blue

silk dress and white dickey and flop-brimmed gray hat with a thick veil pulled down over her face. I watched a hand lift the veil, I glimpsed a hairy wrist...

Dawson's face divided into a shark's grin. "Took you in, didn't I?"

"You sure did. What's the idea?"

"I thought I'd ride along on your morning run."

A light started to glow inside my head. "You mean . . . fool the murderer with that disguise?"

"Not the murderer. Everybody else." He lifted off the hat and set it on the arm of the sofa. "Whoever stuck that pin in her *knows* they did it. So what'll they do when they see her sitting there?"

"Wow!" I shook my head in admiration. "You figure they'll start screaming, thinking you're a ghost?"

"Boy, people don't react like that anymore." He hoisted the hem of the dress and tucked it under his belt. "They'll have listened to the news, and when they don't hear the announcement of Mrs. Voigt's death, they'll know there's a trick. So what'll they do?"

"Turn and run?"

"If they do that, we got 'em. But I doubt if it's that simple." He sat down in the chair and

started rolling down his trouser legs. "No, they'll figure they have to cover up their surprise and act natural. But they won't be able to."

"Why not?"

He hung one of my cigarettes in the corner of his mouth. "This is why not."

"You've lost me," I said, tossing him my lighter.

"Don't worry about it." He flicked the lighter and puffed out a cloud of smoke. "Just study everybody's reaction. Tell me what isn't normal."

It was 6 a.m. when we left the apartment. We ate steak and eggs in an all-night diner and I could feel the pressure building up inside me. When Dawson lit another cigaret I asked him if the case was beginning to wear down his nerves.

"It's a game of nerves all right. But it won't be mine that crack."

Back in the car, Dawson pulled on Mrs. Voigt's coat and settled himself by the window. He rolled up his pant-legs and pulled the dress down over his knees. His hairy legs were a giveaway, so I got an army blanket out of the trunk and tucked it around his feet. He opened the Bible in his lap, pulled down the veil, and tipped his head forward on his chest. "How do I look?"

"Keep the wrists covered and you'll pass."

He pulled the coat over his arms so that only his thumbs protruded. Then he lit another cigaret and said, "Let's go."

A cold bluish light was beginning to drift along the deserted streets. I could have believed that Mrs. Voigt was sitting back there in her usual place, dozing beside the window—if it hadn't been for the cigaret smoke boiling out from under the veil.

"Did it ever occur to you," I asked over my shoulder, "that the murderer's reaction might be—like, violent?"

"That's a risk. Any of those women you can't handle?"

"I dunno. If they start coming at me with hatpins—"

"Don't worry about it. Dinnidie is backing us up."

I glanced in the rear-view mirror and saw the unmarked Ford nose out onto Byers a half-block behind me. "When did you arrange that? Last night?"

"I did a lot of things while you were crapped out in that chair. Don't sweat it. Get your riders talking if you can."

"About what?"

"Murder . . . you know, nothing specific. Just a general rap."

I PULLED UP outside Gloria's

apartment house at 6:55. She threw a kiss at the doorman and ran to the car like a high school girl and I thought, *That's unusual*. I watched her carefully as she opened the door.

She glanced in back and said, "Hi, Mrs. Voigt," then without waiting for an answer slid in beside me. She had seven minutes before Helen crowded up the front seat, and she always used it to stretch her legs and smooth out her hose. I usually enjoyed watching the operation out of the corner of my eye but this morning I was thinking, *What's unnatural?* Gloria seemed unusually cheerful—but then everybody's a little bit brighter on Friday. Thursday's a dead day because we're facing two more days on the rockpile, but Friday we get paid and everybody's thinking about the money . . .

Money. What if Mrs. Voigt was one of those solitary misers who one day carries fifteen thousand dollars to the bank in a paper bag? And what if somebody found out?

I wanted to ask Dawson about it but couldn't see any way to communicate.

Gloria asked, "What's the matter with you today, Breeze? You seem kind of morose."

"Morose. Ha-ha! What's to be morose about? Friday—payday.

I was thinking about all that bread, and how I was gonna spent it all on myself."

She moved closer, until all that separated us was the gear-shift. "We're having a party in my apartment tonight. Could you come?"

"Well, I . . ." My mouth went dry. "I dunno."

"You don't have to tell me now. This evening, okay?"

"Yeah, okay." Another time I'd have bounced my head on the roof with joy, but now I wondered, *Why is she doing this? Is it part of her scheme? Is she trying to distract me?*

Suspicion was a dye which colored everything you looked at. I made a mental note to ask Dawson how detectives managed to live with their wives.

There was a two-minute delay at Helen J's. I saw her in a clinch with her old man in the doorway and I thought, *What can this mean?* When she got to the car I saw a bruise on her cheekbone, but her eyes were shiny and sort of calm and inward-looking, and I decided that things must have gotten interesting in the yellow-trimmed brick house after Dinwiddie's visit.

But what did it have to do with the murder?

Then I thought, *Well if I don't act normal how can the passengers act normal?* So I

gave Helen a big smile and said, "Hi there Mrs. J. and a fine good morning to you."

She slid into the seat and slammed the door. "You act pretty breezy today, Breeze."

She didn't even glance into the back seat; an indication of *something* but I didn't know what.

"Well why shouldn't I be?" I said. "It's payday and we'll all be filthy rich by evening."

"Sure we will—until we do our grocery shopping."

She and Gloria drifted into a woman's type conversation about the price of groceries which lasted until I reached Vera's. Vera had big gray splotches around her eyes and squeezed into the back seat without even looking at Mrs. Voigt. She didn't ask about her hatpin and I thought, *Is that significant?*

As I turned onto Rogers I said, "I didn't find your hatpin, Vera. Sure you didn't walk out with it stuck in you somewhere?"

"Ha-ha," she said in a dull dead voice.

I saw Dawson's head come up behind the veil and make a slight up-and-down movement, and I thought, *Now what does that mean? Is he encouraging me, telling me I'm doing fine?*

Or does he mean that Vera's the one?

Talk about a lot of nerves. . .

I was supposed to talk about murder. How did one bring up the subject? Heard about any good murders lately?

I heard the words and realized I'd spoken out loud. Gloria asked, "What's a good murder and what's a bad one?"

"Well, I guess if you happened to get killed yourself, it's a bad murder."

"Then what's a good one?" asked Helen.

"From your own point of view, that would be when you get away with it."

Gloria asked: "You thinking about killing somebody, Breeze?"

"Well, it's a thought—if riders don't pay up on time."

In the rear-view mirror I saw Vera turn and say something to Dawson, alias Mrs. Voigt. I said, "She got a sore throat this morning, Vera."

"Oh!" Vera was nervous, I could see that. She laid her hand on the back of the seat and I saw that her fingernails were gnawed off to the quick. She lit a cigaret with trembling hands and I thought, *She's the one.*

Then I stopped to pick up Mrs. Riggs. She stood for a second on the grassy strip between the curb and the sidewalk, squinting into the car with her bright birdy eyes, and for a sec-

ond I thought she was going to turn and run. Then she got in chattering about the weather and how she'd have to get her storm windows up this evening, and it struck me that she was an utter and complete phony. Everything she said was like a tinkling bell, all noise and no meaning.

Somewhere around Forty-sixth Street, everybody seemed to run out of words. A curious silence fell in the car. It swelled, billowed and pulsated until I wanted to scream. By the time I pulled into Hamphill's parking lot I felt like my stomach wouldn't hold food for a week. I sat numb and silent while everybody got out—Helen J. with a friendly See-you-later, Gloria with a warm just-between-the-two-of-us smile, Mrs. Riggs with a bright, birdlike chirrup.

That left only Vera and Dawson (alias the late Mrs. Voigt). I glanced back to see if he might have slipped the cuffs on her while I wasn't looking. But no, she had her handbag on her lap and was nervously rolling a cigaret between nicotine stained fingers.

"I won't be riding this evening, Breeze."

"Oh, and why not?"

"Quitting. I'm sick of this eight-to-five. I smoke too much, drink too much—the hell with

it. I'm heading out . . . somewhere. Goodbye, Breezy."

SHE PUT BOTH HANDS behind my head and covered my mouth with a soft, warm kiss which might have led to something beautiful if she hadn't been a murderer.

That's what I thought as I watched her walking toward the building. I glanced back as Dawson lifted off his hat and veil. His face wore a sad-whimsical smile.

"When you gonna make the arrest?"

"In about—two minutes." He pulled up the blue dress and started throwing himself around in the seat while he yanked it up over his hips. "Soon as my other car gets here."

I slumped down in the seat, looking at the dice. They showed one and one. Bad luck for Vera.

"Everybody acted abnormal. How'd you get onto her?"

"It was Mrs. Voigt's financial affairs that started me in the right direction. She spent a lot of bread to keep her father in that home. So I knew she had another deal going. I run into that a lot. If a girl is young and not bad-looking, I figure she's hooking. But an old bird like Mrs. Voigt—well, it had to be blackmail or theft."

I called the security man at the plant while you were asleep. He said yes, there'd been a lot of pilfering from the assembly line. Instruments worth three—five thousand dollars disappeared every week. They'd search the production workers and catch one now and then, but it would always start again. Never seemed to fall below a minimum of say, five thousand a week. That's about five hundred at fence prices.

"This had been going on for eight years—about the same period of time that Mrs. Voigt's dad was in that rest home. She was in a good position, being an inspector—but she had to pass the items to someone who visited the department regularly and wasn't searched. Got it so far?"

I nodded, remembering how Vera used to show up in the mailroom on payday with a sheaf of yellow checks, saying, "Merry Christmas, men." Nobody ever searched her.

I watched the black car pull up in front of the building. Four men got out. Two wore police uniforms. I saw Dinwidie come out with a plant security guard and signal the car.

Dawson got out and said, "This is it, Breeze. Wanta see us make the collar?"

My stomach felt like a lump of lead as we walked up the

steps. It was going to be a memorable day for Hamphill Optics, but I couldn't get with the happy scene because I felt sorry for Vera.

We crowded into the self-service elevator—myself feeling like a midget among giants—and I saw Dawson press the button for the second floor.

"The accounting department's on three," I said.

"So?"

"Vera Thrush works in accounting."

"So?"

"But I thought—"

I broke off as the elevator stopped. I trailed the group down a long shiny hallway toward a doorway with a sign above it.

EMPLOYEES LOUNGE

My head was spinning as we walked into the room. I saw Mrs. Riggs at the counter loading up her cart, doughnut boxes on the bottom, coffee urn on top, wastebasket on the side where she threw the used cups.

She looked up, and I saw the color drain out of her face. "Breezy, who are these men?"

Dawson moved in with his flasher held up in his open hand. "Mrs. Riggs, I'm arresting you for the murder of Edna Voigt."

Her eyes flew wide and her

pupils darted from right to left. Her lips trembled as she said, "I don't understand. Mrs. Voigt was in the car this morning." She looked at me. "Tell him, Breeze."

I shook my head.

Dawson said, "That wasn't Mrs. Voigt and you knew it. Because you killed her. You took Vera's hatpin and substituted a lethal weapon. You thought Vera would get the blame. You studied anatomy so you'd know where to stick the needle for the quickest effect. You'd ridden Breezy's route, so you knew exactly where the noise would cover the job. There's only one thing I don't know and that's why you did it. You wanna tell us that?"

Mrs. Riggs whirled and took a half-step, bumped into Dinnidie, then just seemed to give up. She dropped into a chair, buried her face in her hands and said, "She wanted out. She said her father's stroke was God's way of telling her to quit stealing."

"But that's no reason to kill her," said Dawson. "Just because she was quitting."

Mrs. Riggs lifted her tear-stained face. "She was going to tell, don't you understand? I tried to tell her it wasn't necessary, that she'd be sending me to jail for no reason at all. She said we both needed it for the

good of our souls. We'd get our reward in the hereafter. The old fool. That's why I killed her. The . . . *old . . . fool!*

She buried her face in her hands and sobbed.

The cops stood around shuffling their feet and looking embarrassed. I could tell they were sympathetic but it wasn't going to help Mrs. Riggs. Dawson walked over and gave me a light tap on the shoulder.

"Call you later, Breeze. You better go, or you'll be late for work."

I took the stairs to the basement, walked into the mail-room, slipped on my finger-guards and started metering packages. A half-hour later the supervisor called me to the phone and I heard Dawson's voice.

"Well, Breeze, did you have it figured?"

"She did it while we were bouncing through the alley, right?"

"Right, Breeze. Slipped her hand behind Vera and—*zap!*"

My stomach lurched, as I remembered Mrs. Voigt clutching the strap and trying to speak. She'd been dying then—and I'd thought she was trying to complain about my driving.

"It's hard to believe, you know, that she could have done it with so many people around."

"Well, she had a lot of things

working for her. Mrs. Voigt was probably asleep, which gave her plenty of time to put the needle exactly where she wanted it. There was Vera Thrush—who I noticed usually rode with her nose practically stuck in your ear. That gave her room to work.

"The fact that Mrs. Voigt usually took a nap caused nobody to be alarmed when she didn't move any more. She was dead when you cut across sixth street—and her face would have showed it if Mrs. Riggs hadn't pulled down the head scarf. Like I said, she had it planned.

"Leaving the pin in the hole kept the blood from leaking out onto Mrs. Voigt's clothes. It simply backed up into her veins when the heart-muscle stopped, so that her appearance was exactly like that of a heart attack victim. She used the hat-pin to direct suspicion toward Vera Thrush—the worst thing she could have done, since the first suspect is always the first one cleared."

"Okay. But I'm missing something. You disguised yourself so that only the murderer would know you weren't Mrs. Voigt. You figured she'd give some sign—"

"That's right."

"But nobody did!"

"Correction—Mrs. Riggs did.

Mrs. Voigt didn't smoke—and I had the smell all over my clothes."

He was right. My mom doesn't smoke. I light up in the basement and she's in the upstairs bathroom, she knows it.

"So what'd Mrs. Riggs do?"

"Nothing. That was the tipoff."

"But—she was the only one who didn't smoke. You did the cigaret scene before you ever got in the car—so you must have already known."

"Well, I admit I had strong suspicions. She lived in a better house than she should have. She had the ideal setup, going through the plant twice a day with her coffee cart. She gave Mrs. Voigt a supply of doughnut boxes, see? So Mrs. Voigt would lift one of these expensive instruments off the assembly line, shove it into a doughnut box, and slip it under the cart."

"Mrs. Riggs would go out and buy something, get her package stamped by the security men when she came in, then shift the loot into the stamped package. Probably she bought something every day, so there'd be a couple of dummy packages to cover up the real one. I'm surprised you never wondered why a mild-mannered old doll like Mrs. Riggs would ride with a notorious kamikaze like you."

"Now wait a minute—"

"Traffic records don't lie, boy. She started riding with you when Mrs. Voigt first told her she was going to quit. She didn't plan to kill her then. She just wanted to let her know she was being watched."

I could hardly believe what I was hearing. Two of the sweetest ladies I ever knew.

"Mrs. Riggs always tipped me a dollar when she paid for her rides," I said.

"That should have made you suspicious right there."

"I'll pin that motto on my wall, Lieutenant."

"You do that, Breeze. And if you ever learn to control your driving, we could use you on the force."

He hung up, and I walked back to my postage meter. I couldn't help thinking that only Helen, Gloria and myself was left. The carpool was, in a word, *fini*.

My mind drifted to the scheme Mrs. Riggs had worked for eight years. The inspector-to-coffee-cart play was out now. But we shipped a lot of instruments through the mailroom, and secretaries were always coming down to pick up packages for their bosses. The security men never touched the cupbearers to the mighty.

I shook my head and started piling packages on the belt. Gloria would never go for it.

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JUNE 1976

Murder Comes To School

*Nailing Foster's slayer
looked cut and dried but
the Sheriff wasn't sure
Willie was the murderer.*

by M. G. OGAN

SHERIFF THOMAS ("Tubby") Thorndyke and I were alone in Bill Foster's small office in the Industrial Arts building of Hamilton Parish High School.

"So this is how you found him?" Squatting on his heels,



Sheriff Thorndyke touched a finger to the crude wooden haft of the knife protruding from between Bill's shoulder blades. "Some kid's shop project, a knife made from an old file. I made one myself while I was taking shop in high school and I've still got it around home somewhere."

Sheriff Thorndyke heaved to his feet. Hands on hips, with bright blue eyes he studied the body, then surveyed Bill's office. "I don't reckon we can call this either suicide or accidental death," he said with a rueful chuckle. "The first murder in my jurisdiction in five years and it has to be here at the high school. Just my luck."

I didn't say anything because there was nothing for me to say. I was the new Principal, just a month on the job. I was wondering how the School Board was going to react to Bill Foster's murder.

"Let's see now, you're Tom Sanderson," Sheriff Thorndyke said. He extended a chubby hand. "Sorry we have to meet like this. You don't mind if I call you Tom, do you? You're a young fellow to be in charge of a school."

"Tom will do fine," I said. "I'm not as young as I look. After Vietnam, I got six years of college on my G.I. rights."

"I want you to tell me again

about finding the body, Tom," Sheriff Thorndyke said, "but let's get out of here. I did a Korean hitch but the sight and smell of blood still makes me queazy. You never get used to the smell of death, I guess."

"No, you never do," I admitted.

We moved out into the deserted wood and metal shop. Sheriff Thorndyke closed the door of Bill's office behind him. When he'd hoisted his portly body onto a workbench, I drew up a chair to face him.

"Bill served a hitch in Nam, too," Sheriff Thorndyke said. "Did you know him over there?"

"No, we didn't meet, although he thought we had. Bill was one of those who claim they never forget a face but can't remember names."

"What was your job in the Army?" Sheriff Thorndyke asked. "Or was it Army?"

"I was an M.P."

"Good duty. I was a grunt with a rifle. That was bad duty. Let's see now, you dismissed school after you found the body. Why was that?"

"You know kids. I didn't want a panic situation on my hands. If they knew a killer was loose on the campus, the teachers would have been too nervous to hold classes, anyway. I thought it was a good

idea to clear the school before you got here."

Sheriff Thorndyke nodded thoughtfully. "It probably was the smart thing to do. So neither the kids nor the teachers know Bill Foster has been murdered?"

"That's right. I told them he was taken ill and went home."

Sheriff Thorndyke glanced around the shop. "The State Police crime lab boys will probably take this place apart when they get here," he said. "I'll get a foot-high stack of reports to mull over, and very likely come up with a fat zero."

"Fingerprints on the knife handle could help," I said. "It hasn't been touched."

"I'll make you a bet there won't be any."

"It's no bet," I told him. "Whoever knifed Bill wouldn't make it that easy for you."

"What we need is a motive," Sheriff Thorndyke said. "We'll get to that later, however. Now I want you to tell me again how you came to find the body."

"Well, as I've said, today was like any other Friday until after morning recess. That's from nine thirty until nine forty-five, a chance for students to mob the vending machines while teachers drink coffee and smoke in the teachers' lounge."

"So for fifteen minutes there was a lot of milling around.

Were you in the teachers' lounge?" Sheriff Thorndyke asked.

"No. I stayed in my office. I had a stack of month-end reports. My secretary brought me coffee after recess."

"I noticed the hot plate, tea kettle and smashed cup in Foster's office," Sheriff Thorndyke said. "Did he usually take his break in there?"

"Almost always," I told him. "Bill Foster was a nice enough guy but pretty much of a loner. It was five minutes after the third period bell had rung that Willie Brown came to my office."

"Willie Brown? A big, heavy-set kid, not too bright?"

"That's our Willie," I said. "He's a trouble maker here at school and I see him quite often. I thought Bill had thrown him out of class again, but I was wrong. Willie simply reported that the third period class was locked out of the Industrial Arts building. I took my keys and went with him to see what the problem was. When I let myself into the building I found out soon enough. It was quite a shock."

"Go over again what you did after finding the body," Sheriff Thorndyke prompted.

"I pulled the blinds, turned off the desk lamp and the hot plate. After that I told the boys

that Bill had gone home sick. I sent them over to Eddie Clarke's Phys Ed class until I could get back to my office, dismiss school and call you."

"You pulled the blinds," Sheriff Thorndyke mused. "Did you close and lock the window?"

"No. It was already closed and locked."

"That's odd, on a balmy fall day like this. It's stuffy in here and close in that office." Sheriff Thorndyke frowned. "You couldn't be mistaken?"

"No."

"There's just a narrow alley between this building and the next one. You can see why I wish that window had been open, can't you?"

I shook my head.

"We can figure Foster was killed between nine thirty and nine forty-five. He was, as we know, stabbed in the back and half rose out of his chair before falling down dead with a teacup in his hand. The position of the body tells me that. If the killer didn't come through the window, how did he get into Foster's office and behind him with a knife in his hand?"

"This is a large shop. The murderer could have hidden in that broom closet over there, or somewhere else."

"Possible, or Foster could have admitted someone he

knew during recess. But the question of how he got behind Foster nags me." Sheriff Thorndyke shrugged. "Maybe the crime lab boys will come up with an idea. Now, Tom, don't spare the horses. This is murder. Who held a grudge against Foster?"

"He got along well with most of his students. Willie Brown was the exception, but Willie is in trouble with most of his teachers. I'll be glad to see him turn sixteen and drop out; Then he'll be your problem. Other teachers seemed to like Bill, but I haven't been here long enough to be sure there wasn't any friction."

"Did you like Foster?"

"Sure—we got along fine. It annoyed me some that he kept trying to place my face, although I'd never seen him before, but that was a small matter."

Sheriff Thorndyke slid off the work bench. "I want to talk with Willie Brown," he said, "but I'll stop by his home after we're finished here." He gave me a keen look. "You've got a good enough face, Tom, with all the features in the right place, but if you'll excuse me saying so, it isn't remarkable."

"You're excused," I said. "I reach the same conclusion every morning when I shave."

Back in my office I snapped

my fingers. "I nearly forgot something. A knife was Willie's class project. Bill was against the idea but I talked him out of it."

"Why?" Sheriff Thorndyke asked.

"Willie said it was to be a present for his father."

Surprise widened Sheriff Thorndyke's eyes. "Willie Brown said that? You should know something. Willie lives alone with his mother."

"You mean he doesn't have a father?"

"Oh, he has one, all right, although most people around here don't know it. Willie's father is in the state hospital for the criminally insane."

"Oh, my God! What did he do?"

"It happened downstate. About ten years ago, as I recall. Thad Brown stabbed a woman to death for no apparent reason. Court-appointed psychiatrists said he was schizophrenic and paranoid."

IT WAS TWO hours before the crime lab technicians were finished in the Industrial Arts building and Bill's body was taken away. There would be an autopsy, of course, and an inquest.

Sheriff Thorndyke had asked me to wait in my office until they'd finished their work. I

tried to keep my mind on month-end reports. When he came back, he had the knife that had killed Bill.

The file had been ground so it was more a stiletto than a cutting knife. "No prints on the handle," Sheriff Thorndyke said. "That's a murderous weapon, Tom. I'm surprised Foster ever permitted Willie to finish it."

"I am, too. I surely didn't think Willie had anything like this in mind."

"We're not sure yet," Sheriff Thorndyke reminded me, "that this is Willie's knife."

"Didn't they check the student lockers?" I asked.

"We sure did. None of them are kept locked, so it wasn't much of a problem. Some of the projects those kids are working on . . ." Sheriff Thorndyke shrugged and grinned. "How would you like a lopsided tie rack, or maybe bookends made out of bricks?" Staring at the knife he'd laid on my desk Sheriff Thorndyke became serious. "No sign of a knife in Willie's locker."

"Did they find anything else interesting?"

"Nothing much." Sheriff Thorndyke got up to leave. "One clear thumbprint on the window latch. Probably Foster's."

"That window being closed

and locked still bothers you, doesn't it?" I said.

Sheriff Thorndyke scratched his head. "No. Not any longer."

"Finding Bill like that shook me up, as I've said. It could be I made sure the window was locked. I can't be sure. You know how it is at a time like that."

Sheriff Thorndyke regarded me steadily, then blinked. "Sure. Just for the record, though, give me your thumbprints. Here." He got up and reached for an inked stamp pad. "Got a blank sheet of paper?"

When he'd rolled my thumbprints to his satisfaction, Sheriff Thorndyke folded the paper and tucked it into a breast pocket of his khaki shirt.

"I've a favor, Tom," he said. "I want you to come along while I talk with Willie. He's afraid of me. I've had a couple of long talks with him."

"What about?" I asked.

"Some broken windows around town, stealing from stores, things like that."

"In or out of school, Willie brown seems to be a bad actor."

"I'm afraid he is," Sheriff Thorndyke said.

It was a small frame house, badly in need of paint not far from school.

"Mrs. Brown works as a waitress," Sheriff Thorndyke

said when he turned into the short driveway. "She may be on duty but Willie should be around."

Willie was watching television. When we knocked he answered the door with a sullen expression on his heavy face.

"What do you want?" he asked Sheriff Thorndyke in a hostile voice. "I ain't done nothin'." Willie looked to me. "What's this about, Mr. Sanderson?"

"I'll explain, Willie. Let us in?"

Willie unlatched the screen door and sat on the couch upon which he'd been sprawled. "Ma ain't home," he told us.

Sheriff Thorndyke turned off the television and eased himself into a corner chair. He handed the wooden-hafted knife-stiletto to me. Obviously he was going to let me ask the questions.

"Hey, that looks like my project, Mr. Sanderson," Willie said, eyeing the weapon. "Somebody stole it off me. Where did you find it?"

I pulled a chair around to face Willie. "Where were you during recess this morning, Willie?"

"I come to your office. You remember that."

"That was after recess. You were locked out of the Industrial Arts building."

"Oh, yeah, sure." Willie

poked at his mop of unruly blonde hair with his fingers, opaque eyes staring at me. "Morning recess." He scowled as if trying to remember. "I don't remember," he said. "I didn't have no money for a coke."

"You had a grudge against Mr. Foster," I said, trying a new tack. "Why was that?"

"Grudge?" Willie sampled the word as if it was a new one to him. "What do you mean?"

"Something he did or said made you mad at him," I said. "What was it, Willie?"

The expression on his face closed up. "I don't know what you're talking about. We beefed about that knife. You said it was okay for me to make it."

"You lied to me about your father."

Willie shrugged carelessly. "So I lied. Everyone does. What's wrong about that?"

I balanced the knife on the palm of my hand. Willie's eyes were riveted on it. "Try to remember where you were during recess, Willie. It's important—very important."

"I seen you before recess . . ."

"No, Willie, I'm sorry. It was after recess. We've covered that."

Willie was still staring at the knife. "I don't remember," he said, slowly, "and that's stupid. It was only this morning. I . . . I



can't tell you, Mr. Sanderson. Can I have my knife?"

"I'm sorry, Willie, you can't," I said. "Mr. Foster was killed with this knife during recess. He was stabbed, murdered. Now can you remember?"

Willie gave a galvanic start. "I must have really done it. I was in the closet . . ." He stopped and stared over at Sheriff Thorndyke. "Just like my old man, I'm crazy," he said, and doubled over with a queer, bubbling laughter.

I handed the knife to Sheriff Thorndyke. "I guess you take it from here," I said.

"Right, it's my job now," he said in a sad voice. "Hell of a thing!"

It was two weeks later, after the autopsy and inquest, a

week before Willie Brown went on trial, with the foregone conclusion he'd be judged criminally insane. Sheriff Thorndyke came to see me at the school.

He lowered himself into the chair beside my desk and said, apologetically, "I need to know a couple of things, Tom."

"Just ask," I told him.

"My deputies have been asking around school here," he said. "Kids are funny about the law these days. Some give straight answers, some lie, while others don't give out the time of day. But you know how that is, I suppose?"

"I know," I said. "It can be a problem."

"We can't find anybody who saw Willie during recess. He's a big kid and the kind you'd notice, too."

"The answer to that is obvious, isn't it?"

Sheriff Thorndyke shifted in his chair. "Yes and no," he said. "If he knew what he was doing when he stabbed Foster, he would have slipped out of the Industrial Arts building and made sure someone saw him." Sheriff Thorndyke raised a hand before I could speak. "I know. He blacked out, didn't know what he was doing. I've heard that from the psychiatrists."

"Well?"

"A couple of small things.

Kids in his third period class remember Willie fussing that someone had stolen his knife. He seemed to think Foster had it. Did you know about that?"

"No, I didn't. Bill must have handled it himself."

"Here's another odd thing, Tom. A girl named Velda Johnson isn't sure but thinks she saw Willie come to your office *before* recess."

"She's mistaken about that."

"Could be," Sheriff Thorndyke admitted. "She could be. She's nearsighted and wasn't wearing her glasses."

"Anything else?" I asked.

Sheriff Thorndyke shifted again in his chair, uneasily this time. "That was your thumbprint on the window latch."

"Well, I guess I did check to make sure it was locked. It's queer what you remember and what you forget at a time like that."

"It sure is," Sheriff Thorndyke said. "Boys in Foster's second period class say his office window was open. It stuck, as a matter of fact, and one boy helped him open it. Ross Lawson, I believe."

There was a tight feeling in my throat and chest. "That must have been another day."

Sheriff Thorndyke didn't answer immediately. Not looking at me he rubbed his cheek

with his hand. "Something kept nagging me," he said. "Do you know what it was?"

"I hardly could know." Sheriff Thorndyke was getting on my nerves. "I have a pile of work here on my desk."

"It will keep. What nagged me was that Foster thought he knew your face. That happens with people but it annoyed you. You told me that, remember?"

"Yes, it was annoying."

"I'm sure it was," Sheriff Thorndyke said. "You see, I sent your Thumbprint off to the F.B.I. Now everyone can make mistakes. I didn't believe it when the report came back. They said that print was that of dead man—a sergeant by the name of John L. Doty, killed in a Cong ambush while he was in the custody of an M.P. named Tom Sanderson. So I phoned the Army's C.I.D. division."

"And?" I wondered if Sheriff Thorndyke could hear my heart pounding my ribs.

"Sanderson was due to be

discharged when he delivered his prisoner who, incidentally, had stabbed his C.O. Sanderson's papers and I.D. were in order, so he was discharged. He availed himself of his G.I. rights and got an M.A. in educational administration. Good student, too. Especially high marks in advanced psychology courses."

Sheriff Thorndyke was intent and alert now. "Hypnotism and post-hypnotic suggestion—that's how the psychiatrists believe you kept Willie here in your office while you killed Bill Foster, and then made the kid believe he'd done it. Anything to say, Jack?"

I didn't say anything—there was nothing I could say.

"It was a funny thing," Sheriff Thorndyke told me. "Bill Foster was an M.P. and signed your discharge papers. He would have remembered you as Sanderson if he could have placed your face. Sort of ironic, don't you think?"

NEXT MONTH:

THE WHEELCHAIR MURDER

by FRANK SISK

A reputable nursing home is a most unlikely locale for violent crime, but when opportunity, fear and avarice coincide, murder interrupts ordered serenity. . . .

THE HANDY MAN

by

MARION M.
MARKHAM

Thelma Norburton was an obnoxious chore chiseler. Mercifully, Arthur had the remedy.

"I AM SO LUCKY to have a handy man like you living on the island," Thelma Norburton cooed. Thelma always cooed when she wanted someone to do something for her. She cooed at Arthur frequently. It was cheaper than paying a repair man to fix her vacuum cleaner switch, or her television set, or her toilet valve.



"I just don't know what I'd do without you. Ever since poor Henry passed on I've been so lost. You don't know how difficult it is to be a widow. Everyone tries to take advantage of me and cheat me."

Arthur heard only half of the cooing, as his head was under Thelma's pink kitchen sink. It was the third time in a month that his head had been under Thelma Norburton's kitchen sink. First it was a leak in the pipe leading to the dishwasher—then the garbage disposal jammed—now the diamond ring in the drain. Today he was under there longer than usual, and his back was aching badly. In addition, he had twice bumped his head against the garbage disposal unit.

"Since you and Millie moved in next door my life has been so much easier. You can't think how relieved I was. The house was empty for so long, while the will was being contested. And sometimes I saw strange lights at night. But, of course, the police never paid any attention to my calls. And then you moved in, and I felt so much safer.

"I wasn't scared to death that I'd be murdered in my bed after you came. And to find out that you can fix absolutely anything. I mean, I certainly am the luck-

iest widow in Florida. I told Millie that just yesterday. Millie, I said, I am absolutely the luckiest widow on the Gold Coast to have two of the cleverest people in south Florida for neighbors.

Arthur had heard all about that conversation from Millie before.

"Now she wants you to re-upholster a bedroom chair for her," Millie recounted. "And she'd like me to make new drapes to match. Is this what retirement is all about, Arthur? Making drapes for my neighbor? I made my own for years, and hung my own wallpaper, and re-covered our dining room chairs myself just so we could save enough money to retire. I don't want to spend that retirement making Thelma Norburton's drapes.

"Tell her you won't do it."

"Arthur, you know how she is. So forceful and pathetic at the same time. She can afford to have an interior designer make new drapes every month, but she still manages to make me feel guilty if I say no to her. I think it's the neighborhood. We don't belong with all these wealthy people. And Thelma knows how I feel and uses it to make me feel like a servant."

"You're not Thelma's servant. You're my wonderful wife, and you belong here as much as she

does. Two million is hardly poverty."

"But it shows—all the years I washed my own dishes and made my own clothes. It shows in my hands and the way my shoulders are bent. It shows, too, that you used to wind your own condensers—or whatever those things were you worked on every night when Alice was a baby and the business just starting."

"It doesn't show. We're as good as anyone else on this island."

"Then why did Thelma ask you to put up a new shelf in her garage just two days after we moved in?"

"I'll speak to Thelma tomorrow and tell her you won't make her drapes and I won't re-cover her chair. I won't have her making my wife feel like a servant." He kissed her gently. "I promise you, I'll take care of it tomorrow."

Arthur tried to speak to Thelma the next morning. When he opened his mouth, Thelma cooed at him about how her *diamond* ring that dear Henry had given to her on their *last Christmas together* had gone down the kitchen drain, and would Arthur mind terribly getting it out for her?

So Arthur lay on his back under the pink sink, while Thelma sat at the glass-topped

wrought iron kitchen table—also pink. She sipped grasshoppers, never offering anything to Arthur, and cooed.

"My goodness, Arthur. I never thought it would take *this* long to get a little old diamond ring out of a little old *sink* drain. I'm playing *bridge* at two. I mean, you fixed the *washing machine* in an hour, and you had to take it *all* apart. Remember how I bet you *wouldn't* get it all back *together* again? But you *did*. You really are so *marvellous* with your *hands*. I don't believe there's *anything* you can't do.

"Does Millie *appreciate* you? *Really appreciate* you, I mean. If she ever gets tired of you, you just come *right* over here. You *understand*? Henry Beaman Norburton may have inherited *twenty million* dollars. But he couldn't hold a *candle* to you when it comes to *electricity* and *plumbing*. I really *am* the *luckiest* woman to have a *strong, intelligent, clever* man like you around.

"Almost finished," Arthur said, giving a last twist to the thin copper wire he was working with. He handed out the diamond ring that looked too small for Thelma's pudgy fingers.

"You still have time to make your *bridge* game." He slid out from under the sink and began

gathering up the wire cutters, voltage tester and other tools.

"I just don't know how to thank you, Arthur. Would you like a glass of water?"

"No, thanks, Thelma. It's almost two, and Millie will wonder what's become of me."

"Well, I do appreciate it. You really are the cleverest man. Is there anything you can't do?"

"Not once I set my mind to it, Thelma," he said proudly.

Arthur felt real pride later that evening, when he saw the sudden eerie glow in the kitchen next door, and then

total darkness. He'd never wired a garbage disposal before.

Continuous feed disposal units were dangerous, he had always said, what with water running and women pushing things through the metal sink ring with wet hands. If ever the fuse on the unit didn't cut off right, if something happened to short the motor and send an electric current up to that metal ring . . .

Of course, it was probably a one-in-five-hundred-million chance—unless a handy man knew how to fix it just right.

MIKE SHAYNE PRESENTS:

Next Month's Four Headliners

MURDER MOST FAIR by BRETT HALLIDAY

The New Mike Shayne Complete Short Novel

THE WHEELCHAIR MURDER by FRANK SISK

An Exciting, Shocking Novelet

THE MOURNING AFTER by JAMES McKIMMEEY

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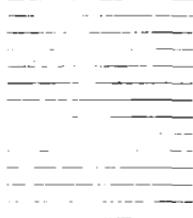
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